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Terence M. Green Growing into Writing: An Autobiographical Essay

Our own lives start long before we're born. Millions of years of genetic cascading funnel down into our great-grandparents, then grandparents, finally parents.

I wrote those words. You can find them near the beginning of chapter six of my 2001 novel, *St. Patrick's Bed*. Casting about for a beginning to this essay, I realized that I'd already turned much of this soil, distilling many of my thoughts and feelings about family throughout my own stories. People have asked me about my fiction: Did it happen like that? My answer, usually, no... but it is all true. Fact, fiction, fact, fiction.

Born in Toronto's Irish Cabbagetown in 1904, the oldest of five children who lived, Thomas Green, my father, entered the work world in 1918, where he toiled for 51 years until retirement in 1969. The majority of that time he spent doing blue-collar work in the circulation departments of two Toronto newspapers: *The Globe and Mail* (23 years) and *The Toronto Star* (17 years).

He was a part-time professional musician. At the beginning he played hango, later strummed guitar in various groups and orchestras around southern Ontario, and finally, by the time I had arrived, demonstrated a rather rare versatility by morphing into a trombone player in the Royal Canadian Artillery band. I remember the mellow slide sounds as he practiced in the basement. I remember him marching and playing in the annual Santa Claus parade. When he died in 1995, in the top drawer of his dresser, in a plastic case, I found a small metal plaque with his name engraved on it. It stated that he was a Life Member of the Toronto Musicians Association, Local 149 A. F. of M.

On November 30th, 1929—one month after the stock market crash that signaled the Great Depression—my father, two days shy of his 25th birthday, married twenty-year-old Margaret Radey, my mother—also born in Toronto—in a wedding whose strange timing would be clarified by the arrival in May, 1930, of my oldest sister, Anne. She was the first of five surviving (as in his own family) children born during the nineteen-year span from 1930 to 1949, in a marriage that would last almost 54 years—until my mother's death in 1984—defying its hurried, unromantic origins. Ron was born in 1932, Judy 1939. My younger brother and I were the late family: February 2nd, 1947, for me; Dennis, 1949.

Dennis and I were postwar babies—a distinct unit, raised as a pair—far removed from Anne and Ron. Even Judy, our other sister, born in 1939, was virtually a decade older. Dennis and I, then, were the children of older parents, with all that that entails—an experience, in hindsight, mostly positive.

In the three-bedroom, semi-detached house in North Toronto, purchased in 1929, there was always family around—uncles, aunts, cousins, added to brothers, sisters and grandparents. This was the crowded scene into which I made a late arrival. Both sides of my family were Catholics who had emigrated from Ireland (counties Kerry, Cork, Dublin, Offaly, Limerick) and settled in and around Toronto and southern Ontario in the mid-1800s. My father's mother, Nanny (Anne)

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Henry Wessells Ten Bears; or, a Journey to the Weterings: A Critical Fiction

I—A Funeral Procession

Like almost everything in a rich and highly individual life, the ambassador's funeral cortege was spectacular. There was nothing unseemly in the gathering of international dignitaries, colleagues, and scholars; nor even in the mix of eccentrics, mendicants, and professional criminals who hovered at the edges before joining in the procession. I would place myself somewhere between the two groups: I am a dealer in rare and antiquarian dreams, and the ambassador had been one of my most highly esteemed customers. He had collected dreams of flying, of wild animals, and of mountain streams. He was a genius who had that rare quality of discerning the genuine dream from mere imitative fancies. He was a mentor and friend; his interests had shaped my own professional specialization.

The trade in haysnesse, the exotic dream-objects that induce the experiences of the dream, is ultimately a useless one, as the ambassador had laughingly rebuked me whenever he felt I needed such a reminder. This was often a prelude to purchasing one of those treasures of human imaginative expression that justify my existence. As I took my place in the file of marchers, I saw a huge bear and its keepers making their way into the ranks. I was not surprised to see an emanation of the ambassador leading the way, flanked by a Chinese official or warlord in ceremonial garb. After a short walk through the pastures and tall grasses that misty afternoon, we gained the cremation ground, where the pyre had been readied for the small wooden coffin. The ambassador seemed to be everywhere at once, kissing the cheek of a stunning blonde, bowing faintly to a clutch of Japanese industrialists and more respectfully to a slightly shabby religious man, and giving me an insubstantial hand and a very clearly articulated farewell. It's all dreams now, my friend.

And then all of a sudden the clouds parted. I saw the deep footprints of the bear in the turf. The ambassador's emanation took



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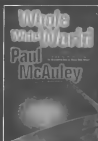
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Ten Bears

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a lighted brand from an attendant and set the pyre ablaze before dissolving into a shimmer of light.

There was a moment of stunned silence, then a few isolated laughs spread throughout the gathering, all friends now after such a shared experience, the ambassador's death entirely of a piece with his life. The attendants motioned us upward from the bonfire, towards laden tables beneath an orchard of pear trees in flower, where the opening of bottles of champagne punctuated the crackle of the flames.

I walked over to look at the bronze bear, whose two trainers held the ends of chains attached to a bronze collar. It was a striking beast that towered over its handlers. They were talking to an older man whom I perceived to be a senior bureaucrat of the sort who often prove the best of customers. The men and the bear were from the Waterways or Waterways, a small country unknown to me. The white-haired justiciar said, Our mutual acquaintance was truly a remarkable man, an eagle flying far above the mud in which the rest of us plod. I met him thirty-five years ago, during his first posting in wartime Serbia. It was in the remote Kala Ayak mountains that the ambassador caught the bear. We exchanged ipanillar, data strings, and the justiciar invited me to visit him in the Waterways. When the bear showed signs of restlessness the younger trainer, with a splendid cavalry officer's moustache, shook the chains and led the bear away. Its fur, light brown tinged with silver and black and rust, glowed in the lingering sunlight.

II—A Reminder of Impermanence

In my profession, there are certain dreams that come to me and others that compel me to search for them. Hayalnesse are small artifacts created from the intensity of the dream itself, and to touch one is to enter the full range of experience that is the dream. Dreams are stored in boxes of oak and copper and iron that preserve their clarity. One night each year, at the festival of the dream moon of late spring, hayalnesse are brought out from their boxes to renew their potency. Each dream is unique, rarely, a great master will create a hayalnesse that pays homage to a classical dream even as it is recognizably the master's own.

And like all things, dreams are subject to change and decay. One day long ago, just after a brief thunderstorm, I came upon an estate sale at a farm beside a willow-lined river. On a table beside bundled silverware and old jewelry, the unknown heirs had spread a series of dreams, removed from their protective boxes for display. The sunlight and rain had reduced these authentic dreams of colonial architecture and dance to faded wisps useless even to scholars.

Several weeks after the ambassador's funeral, I thought again of the Waterways when I learned of the upcoming sale of a major collection of dreams from the turbulent Tussentijd of three centuries past. There were dreams on zoological subjects, mountaineering, architecture, and consequences, many attributed to great dream masters. The auction was to be held, not in London or Paris, but in the ancestral castle of the now extinct Wolkenbrunnen dynasty on the high plateau of the cloud-mists or, in fact, just a short distance from the border of the Waterways. The great dreamer Mahdjar Reynbogen worked for a time under the patronage of the Wolkenbrunnen princelings. I have had his Vulture of Insight, which he created just after leaving the court world for the itinerant life of the mountain passes and woodland villages where his greatest dreams were formed. The auction seemed to be worth attending.

The same afternoon I received a brief and obliquely knotted data string from the justiciar, reiterating his invitation to visit, stating that I would find several reputable dealers in old dreams in the capital city and its environs. There was a discreetly wise added strand conveying his interest in consulting me on a professional matter concerning stolen dreams. I sent off a cord with the date of my expected arrival.

My train reached the railhead at dawn on the morning of the

auction. I had been warned to expect to find no transportation and relished a prospect of a long walk up through the foothills. I was not mistaken. The spring was further advanced than in my native city, edging into summer. At first, I walked between pastures and planted fields under bright sunlight. By midmorning, the dusty road beside the mountain torrent had turned steeper and cut through ancient pine forests topped with clouds.

At one bend, I caught my first glimpse of the squat Wolkenbrunnen fortress dominating a rocky spur. Light is objective. The castle seemed to be resting on the clouds and the clouds stretched endlessly in all directions. Dreams leave their traces upon the houses where they occur as surely as upon the persons who experience them. The moment I crossed the threshold of the castle I knew that the auction was a bust. The finest dreams of the Wolkenbrunnen patrons had disappeared long ago, carried away in the pockets of fickle courtiers and malcontented servants. All that was on offer was a selection of images of travel, cheap shape-changing, and banal sexual fantasies lacking both artistry and novelty. I could imagine the voice of Mahdjar mocking me. Why do you seek the vulture and the bear in the abode of rats?

I accepted a ride down the mountain road in the carriage of a French colleague, a specialist in dreams of elaborate meals and rare wines, whose disappointment far exceeded my own. We reached the rail station long after dark. I found that a long train ride and a short boat trip would bring me to the Waterways by noon the following day.

III—A Case of Murder and Stolen Dreams

The misting rain that greeted my approach to the Waterways dried under a steady wind and hints of clear blue sky. Stiff from my travels, I walked for a time but could make no sense of the geography. The principal city of the Waterways was a maze of canals and sluices and winding pathways, lanes and quays and islands with names such as Inner Edge or Right Across, South Corner or Eighth Elm Bend, all suggesting a long-vanished center that did not appear in the data cords. It was a green city, old brick walls shaggy with vines, gravel and polished cobblestones and grassgrown lanes, patches of wild carrot, nettle, bramble, and elder rooted in corners. Houseboats and barges were moored along the water canals. Many species of animal and bird lived in the water margins and islets: herons, streetbuds, swindogs, and high in the trees I saw a clutch of monkeys. Everywhere the pulse of drum beats, varying sequences from drums of wood, metal, or skin, some near at hand, others muted by distance. Against this network of communication, I heard intermittent bursts of pure sound: liquid birdsong, workmen's shouts, and the hammering of woodpeckers. I hailed a water taxi, stopped at the hotel long enough to refresh myself, then made my way to a many-angled stone building surrounded by trees and lawns.

I found the justiciar working at his desk, a heavy table of polished oak a shade lighter than the paneled walls. He wore a raw silk suit of antique and expensive cut. On two sides of the room, leaded windows set into deep stone walls gave onto an overgrown garden court, its muted green light filled the room. An oak data cabinet lined the inner side of his office: a rail double array of moveable racks, each one of the dozens of hinged frames a meter square with thousands of data strings hanging from the upper rail. The open data racks presented a looming tangle of information so dense and specialized that I shifted my gaze to the garden windows.

The justiciar's desk was empty save for a glass of water and a few twists of cord. He glared at me with an intensity not quite softened by his smile, and said, I am pleased to welcome you to our small and damp country. You will find our way of life simple but not without comforts. We have already some connection. Our friend the ambassador spoke very highly of you on three occasions, as a man of learning and intuition. He pulled idly on a fine thread of data, passing the complex knots across long and carefully groomed fingertips, then swept the memory strings into a top drawer.

Through the window behind him, I saw the bear playing a lumbering game of football with the younger officer. As we are dealing with a criminal case, I trust you will not fault our hospitality when I propose to turn immediately to business. The murder of Etter Losgelder presents several interesting points. Normally, great

wealth simplifies our investigation. In this case, there are four principal suspects, and our task is complicated by stolen dreams. There are no memory strings to assist in identifying them. I will value your insights. At present, we conjecture that the theft is linked to the murder; it is not merely an opportunistic and independent action. The question is, could that line connect? Later today, we will interview the murdered man's lady friend, though I do not consider we have any serious suspicions for her.

The justice's senior officer entered. Clutchplaine was a solidly built man of my age with a bland, sleepy face, wearing a blue suit that somehow looked too large for him. The three others, the justice continued, the murdered man's nephew, a local dreamseller, and a domestic servant, are suspects of a different order. The servant has the face of a murderer and I expect confirmation that he had ties to wartime atrocities. The dreamseller is of questionable repute but has never been convicted of any crime. Several prior investigations for receiving stolen properties were merely inconclusive. He is so thoroughly disliked by his peers that any local expertise is tainted. I collect nothing and so I will value your professional knowledge. Clutchplaine will brief you on our way to his shop. The nephew is a known gambler with a history of debt and I fear that he has taken flight. My younger associate Speier is directing the search for him. It isn't a simple case and I prefer us looking at it from different sides.

IIII—Two Interviews

We stepped from the powerboat onto a stone key before a row of old commercial buildings. Young fellow, said the justice, I merely ask you to observe the man's shop and his person. I will not intrude you and I do not ask you to speak to him.

A lumber business occupied the ground floor. Rarely have I felt an atmosphere so close and brutal as in that house. The residue of violent dreams was unmistakable and profoundly disquieting. I said nothing and followed the justice and Clutchplaine up the stairs. At the top, past a partly opened door, I could see morning sunlight flooding through windows.

Clutchplaine pushed the door wide and entered. The light seemed to dwindle. Seated at a desk was a small, obese man, bald and wheezing and bloated with retained dreams. In an instant, I knew why his local colleagues shunned him and why the light failed in this room. On a shelf behind him were several of the dark dreams of Loemgor Tulst, a master of a century ago who was murdered by his chief patron and former lover. His dreams are prized in certain circles where discipline, torture, and confinement are couched in allegorical language. There were a few interesting natural history dreams in very new boxes on his desk, but the core of this dreamseller's trade was in such tainted dreams.

The man sat almost immobile in his shop, crowded now with three visitors as unwelcome to him as a Tulst nightmare to me. Clutchplaine must have sensed the dream climate, for he gruffly ordered the fat man to stand up and turn out the contents of his desk. The dreamseller's inactivity was deceptive, for he rose nimbly enough. A small data frame on the wall held only dusty strings and traces of slith.

Clutchplaine shouted at the man and started drumming on the desk with his fist and opening cabinets wildly until the justice told him to stop, then calmly directed the dreamseller to produce business records for the past year by the following morning.

When we returned to the key, the justice signaled to waiting officers and discussed surveillance. Once in the boat, he said, Worse than I expected from his file, much worse. He raised his eyebrows when I gave him details of the Tulst connection and again when I mentioned the incongruous dreams in new boxes. He said nothing. I was glad to be out on the water under a brilliant sun in an empty sky.

Late in the afternoon, Clutchplaine escorted a tall well-dressed woman into the justice's office. She looked about forty, with a long strawberry blonde plait and a languid presence untouched by any dreams. The old man turned from the window box of begonias and greeted her with a severe frown and a chilly, formal tone.

He told her to sit but remained standing at his desk. My officers have investigated your connections with the murdered man. I expect you knew long ago that you inherit a sizeable fortune upon his

death. A portion of his property is missing. Valuable dreams, his attorney tells me, that are to be sold to benefit a charity. I tell you, Feule de Kloost, that had my officers found the slightest irregularity in your financial affairs, you would certainly be occupying a different room in this building.

You don't like me, the woman answered him coolly enough, but we understand each other clearly. I knew the terms of the will as it was drafted. Everything I inherit was earned, but I lose by her's dearth. The villa, the island house, the yacht, all that is gone now. As you know. She had a mathematical jazz voice, perfect in tone and fascinating. I had no interest in his little boxes of dreams, she said, once he was very excited about a new purchase and asked me to dream one of them, something to do with a rhinoceros but I found it made me anxious and after that he never asked me.

Said, There are no longer any rhinoceros in the Waterways. Our eyes met, and the corner of her mouth moved in a flicker of a smile. Without turning my gaze from her, I said, Clutchplaine, you may arrest that toad we visited this morning. One of the dreams on his desk was the Rhinoceros of Doubt of Karl de Hakkelar. He didn't even bother to conceal it.

The woman relaxed, shifting her body slightly in the chair. She said, You have no reason to detain me now. She stood up, looking impatiently at the justice, darting a glance at me when he said, Our foreign visitor's remarks shed a new light on the case. You are free to go. She shook my hand and said, Merci, in a lingering jazzy whisper. I left the office with her. Her graceful voice and responsive body offered the promise of more complexities than any dream.

V—The Raven and the Turtle

The next morning, the justice and his two officers met me at my hotel. There were a dozen dreams in new boxes on the dreamseller's desk when my men picked him up yesterday. He admits nothing, but we can hold him for a day while we pursue other aspects of the investigation. I'd like you to come with us to the villa and to be present at another interview.

On the canal, I asked the justice about the geography of the Waterways. Oh, yes, said the justice, the central markplazas was flooded during the Waterlood, our war of resistance to the invading Andalus. It was never rebuilt; for afterwards it proved more efficient to create smaller, dispersed markets and administrative unities throughout the city. But all the channels and pathways still lead to or around that void.

We traveled to a more elegant quarter of large houses set well back from the banks of long water meadows amid tree-lined pathways of dressed stone. A brief tour of the villa gave me enough of a sense of the murdered man's dreams to knot a quick tally of the genuinely powerful ones. The traces of Akjar's Dragon in Winter that remained were enough to make my entire journey worthwhile from a professional standpoint. I was almost tempted to ask the justice if I might later examine this haze, the greatest that had ever been dreamed at the villa, but then determined to wait.

The justice interviewed the elderly servant at a table outside the cottage in back of the murdered man's villa. They were both old men: the white-haired justice was bland and cheery, the servant was sour faced, with an evasive gaze beneath poorly dyed black hair. Flanked by Speier and Clutchplaine, the suspect fidgeted in his chair, scratching his right wrist with the long bony forefinger of his left hand. The justice pressed him about the stolen dreams, but the man was firm in his denial.

The justice started a new line of questions about the servant's future prospects. This proved to be the necessary wedge, and before long the justice forced an admission. Yes, the servant said, I took a box of the master's gold coins after I learned of his death. I have to keep a roof over my head when the young master kicks me out of this one. That rat of the master's won't give me anything from his pile now. His left hand moved into the right sleeve. Clutchplaine leapt toward him, shielding the justice. There was a flash of icy blue light and the detective fell to the ground. Speier pounced upon the old servant, wrenched him to his feet, and held up a small bronze tube.

The justice remained seated, impassive even as Clutchplaine's body dissipated into mist and a raven opened shadowy wings that

gathered substance from the fleeting haze. The raven cocked his head at the justiciar, barked once, and took flight, circling the sky above the garden briefly before vanishing. A sounslarmak, an accelerator of consequences, highly irregular, said the justiciar. Most interesting. He extended his right hand. Speier tossed him the device and absently twisted the servant's arm still higher. You may release him, Speier, the justiciar said in a calm whisper. Highly irregular. He gestured at the servant, whose face twitched with terror.

The same icy flash emerged from a small hole in the tube. The servant collapsed into fog. A snapping turtle looked up at the justiciar, who crushed the cylinder under his heel. He stood with a wince and said, there is nothing here to detain us further. I never remember which end is which on these little accelerators, so I have often reflected upon the consequences should I direct it at myself by mistake. . . . The small turtle retracted head and legs when the justiciar picked it up. He smiled and led us toward the quay where the launch awaited. Speier said, Clutchplait has started a new series of adventures. His face had a wistful look as if he were seeing farther than I could at that moment, to infinity and beyond.

VI—A Turle on a Wooden Flute

We came to a small storefront restaurant on a busy gracht. Speier said, The fried noodle dishes are very good here, with bean curd and peanuts and hot chilis. I nodded agreement at his choice. The justiciar ordered a fried sole, instructing the owner precisely how he wished it prepared.

As we ate, the justiciar talked of his early postings in the overseas colonies of the Waterways. He said, The loss of our colonies in Insulindia during the war was a splendid opportunity forced upon us. In the arrogance of power, we had forgotten that our geography is our character, and that the inhabitants of the islands we administered shared many character traits. We had much to learn from them, and the process has begun. Not the least of the improvements is the change in our national cuisine.

As we left the restaurant, he pulled the turtle from his jacket pocket. We shall return to the justiciar, where Speier's inquiries may have brought results. High, fast-moving clouds filled the evening sky. In one of the quadrangles, the justiciar released the turtle at a rock edged pool. Elsewhere in the courtyard, there were giant goldfish in shallow clear ponds. The windows were mostly dark.

Speier returned and said, The Marsh Police have sighted the nephew in an old trapper's shack along the North Swamp. We can reach the area in half an hour. He pointed to a long speedboat with a canoe secured atop its bows. We are a continuous emergency. The pilot cast off and swiftly wove between the water taxis and houseboats, leaving the city channels for a wider flood within a few minutes.

On the open water, he accelerated to maximum speed. The settled landscape fell away. We passed a reeking landfill and then entered a rugged, indifferent swamp that bore few traces of human activity. The pilot signaled to Speier and dropped the speed to a silent crawl. Speier nodded and exchanged a few words with the justiciar. The pilot turned into a narrow coulee overhung with marsh oak and heavily scented branches of swamp tulip. Speier climbed forward and freed the canoe. I helped him lower it to the water. He took his place in the stern and motioned me into the bow. The justiciar stepped in and seated himself gingerly on a cushion. Speier and I had paddles in our hands when the justiciar spoke. We will approach quietly and I will convince him to surrender. Speier, I have brought an accelerator of consequences and would prefer not to use it.

I paddled steadily in the dim light. We turned a bend in the swamp channel and entered a dense stretch of reeds, jagged leaves, and tall pale green canes. The air became sulphurous, thick, and damp. Frog calls rose and fell in cyclical rhythms. Speier paused. We drifted out of the reeds to the edge of a broad pool of open water. I could distinguish a ruinous shack beside a low springhouse of dressed stone. Speier quietly propelled the canoe to a patch of solid-looking bank.

In silence, the justiciar stepped onto dry land, and motioned Speier to follow. He walked straight to the door of the shack and called out, In the name of the Queen, open the door! He stood with an air of placid unconcern.

There was a noise of breaking wood at the side of the shack. Speier

raced forward and tackled a young man running towards a rowboat. He drew a knife and stabbed Speier in the chest. Speier disappeared in an iridescent flash, illuminating the marsh in a flood of light, then instantly reappeared behind the assailant to disarm him and push him to the ground in handcuffs. Twilight returned to the clearing about the shack.

The justiciar joined Speier, speaking in tones I could not hear. Speier pulled the nephew to his feet and took him to the rowboat. The justiciar seated himself in the stern beside the prisoner and called to me, Speier will follow us in the canoe, if you will take the oars here. The justiciar questioned the nephew.

I began to row, concentrating at first on finding the channel leading back to the police speedboat. From the canoe, Speier pointed ahead to a narrow gap in the reeds. I heard the young man say, It's so otherwise out there. . . . There's too much that still clings to me. . . . The ten thousand things. I was almost there.

The journey back to the city seemed twice as long as the trip into the swamp. Speier sat up at the bow, looking out over the water. The justiciar continued to speak with his prisoner but the rushing water masked their conversation. The nephew was young and handsome but his features were marked by dark and poisoned desires. When we reached the pier, Speier tied up and ran off before the rest of us had set foot on land. Junior officers collected the prisoner.

The justiciar suddenly appeared to notice me and invited me to come to his office. We walked along a gravel path between beds of carefully tended roses. As we approached the building, I saw Speier riding the bear and playing a slow minor tune on a small wooden flute.

VII—No Idea

We entered the justiciar's office through a side door. One lamp cast a dim light on his desk; there was another near the wall of data frames. One strand we have not yet unraveled, he said, pointing to a chair, and then consulted his archives. I heard the soft clack of oak rods and then he returned to his desk with a tightly knotted data string. He smiled broadly and his eyes gleamed. I wished to verify a reference lodged in my faulty memory, he said. Several hundred years ago, a learned justiciar recorded his observations on a variety of criminal cases. The Tangled Knots in a Pine Forest of Gauw Lopey is a classic work known chiefly to scholars; none of my modern colleagues are likely to know of it, much less consult it. My methods are regarded as unconventional. In one of his tangled knots Gauw comments that the principal suspect in a murder case must always remain the murdered man, for the crime is a consequence of his actions.

He chuckled. Such a distinctly unmodern thought. Clutchplait was correct in finding the dreamseller of criminal interest, but for the wrong reasons: he was not a murder suspect. I miscalculated badly in assessing the servant: I thought he had the face of a murderer, but I assumed the deed was in his past, not in his immediate future. Again, a fuller understanding of the character and actions of Etter Losgeider would have alerted me to the servant's fear of an impoverished retirement. A review of financial strings had assured me that the Freule de Kloost was innocent of murder but I needed to provoke a genuine response. The strategy yielded fruit unexpectedly. As for the nephew, he will admit only that there was an accident during an argument about gambling debts, when his niggardly uncle attempted to impose a series of strict conditions before lending the money. Such grudging treatment of those nearest him. Ahhh. . . . All this activity caused by nothingness.

The justiciar pushed a buzzer on his desk and told the officer who appeared, bring the prisoner to the Eye. He rose and said, There is one knot we may untangle somewhat. It seems certain that the murdered man has not yet. . . . transcended mind.

The justiciar walked along a corridor into another wing of the complex. Beside two adjacent metal doors, three officers stood with the prisoner, now in standard issue clothing but washed and looking calmer. The guards opened one of the doors and put the prisoner into a small room. The justiciar unlocked the other door and entered, asking me to join him. The eye of consequences, ayns sounslari, he said. You will not see this view elsewhere.

A small window of thick glass gave onto the next room. In the pale light of another world, I saw the nephew with a large brown mothwinged snake demon clinging about his shoulders, its long

tongue licking a sore on his neck. The justiciar said, You may wish to shield your eyes. He pushed a button and there was a bold spark of lightning. The nephew looked years older, but free from the dream taint. A young beagle squirmed at his feet. At a signal from the justiciar, the officers led the young man away. The beagle followed eagerly. Back in the justiciar's office, through one of the windows, I saw the full moon emerging from clouds at the horizon.

VIII—The Night of Airing Dreams

Come with me, my young friend, the justiciar said, these events have given you only a narrowed and twisted perspective on our land. We are much indebted to your expertise and discernment. He led the way to a smaller power launch at the wharf with two smartly uniformed officers on board. We passed through a labyrinth of waterways and islands, stone-lined canals leading to stretches of open water with soggy banks, marshy dikes giving way to crazy paved landings before ornate brick townhouses. The tight grid and hard pavements of my native city were only distant memories. The justiciar commented briefly upon events that had occurred a decade, a century, or three centuries earlier. He pointed out the residence of a famed admiral who died just at a decisive point in the resistance against the Andalus. The waterfall had dried up long ago, yet its name remains. His gaze was at once intent and detached. I exist the way a cloud exists. After a time, the launch pulled in at a weathered jetty.

We climbed ashore and set out along a brick path. With us, the justiciar said, the night of the dream moon retains something of the spontaneous feel of the village fête. The soft winds carried hints of curious dreams. There was none of the museum stuffiness that characterized the festival in my native land. At irregular intervals, wooden booths and tables lined the keys and grachts and alleyways, with men and women in bright garb walking at a leisurely pace and stopping along the canal paths and lanes, drinking a light summer beer or sampling from platters of cakes, enjoying the mild spring weather. We followed a wandering course through a variety of neighborhoods. As the dream moon rose higher in the sky, the hazy scene was brought forth from their cases and the atmosphere changed subtly.

Along the streets, clusters of people continued to laugh and talk, but there were nodes of silence that lingered even after the dreamers moved on. Without action or effort, I could distinguish layers of dream imagery that mingled and dissipated.

The justiciar steered me away from the busier pathways, onto a little track between fields of tall grasses and nettles. We climbed a small hill and came to an open patch where freshly scythed grass littered the path. One booth was crowded with dozens of simple, earnest dreams: a young man's success in rowing, a bowl of fresh raspberries in winter, a summer field of flowers, the large eyes and sweet breath of a favorite cow.

A few steps further, before the crumbling outer wall of a grand, decaying house there stood a table with two dreams and their ancient dark oak boxes. The first was a merchant ship captain's homecoming, a centuries-old treasure with layers of storm and piracy and spices and gold; the second a curious architectural vision, a walk through vast galleries and shadowed chambers that strayed into the borders of nightmare before opening to a bright, many-pillared dawn. When I remarked upon this dream to the justiciar, he told me that no commerce was conducted upon this festival evening, but I might leave my card with a note that I would be willing to call the following day. For today, he said, mediocrity is gone, there are no goals and no limitations.

We walked slowly but did not remain in any one place for long. I did not attempt to keep my bearings in the moonlight. The justiciar had evidently chosen our route with care, however, for two hours after nightfall he turned to me and said, Our paths separate here. Your hotel is just a few minutes' walk along this gracht. Tomorrow afternoon, an hour before sunset, I will send a launch to collect you at the hotel pier. He walked down a tiny passage between two houses, and I soon lost sight of him.

IX—The Dance of the Bear

The next day, I made my way back to the dilapidated mansion and found the family willing to sell the maritime haymosses for the price of a new roof. I agreed without hesitation, for the dream was by a great master, all of whose dreams were thought to have perished. The couple would not sell the architectural dream. That is where we first met and

(Torcon pictures, continued from p. 3.)



Kim Stanley Robinson
& China Miéville



John Hertz & Darrell Schweitzer, Finnish



Emily Pohl-Wear,
granddaughter, von Hugo



Elizabeth & Peter Hartwell with Jessica Reitzel & Paige Schroeder



Robert Silverberg & Duane Wilkins for scale

loved each other, the old woman said with a smile. I will have it sent to you as a gift when we are dead, but I cannot sell it. I refused, and went away puzzled by her words and the potent memory of the dream.

Back at the hotel, I rested and thought about my return to work until the power launch arrived. When we reached a stone pier in a grassy, park-like section, I saw the justiciar waiting at the top of the steps. He walked away from the water and talked softly about the prospects for the nephew of the murdered man, then reviewing aspects of the cases against the corrupt dreamseller. Separate causes that shared the same effect. I matched my step to the slow pace of the justiciar. He pointed to a small stone hut from which a narrow rivulet issued in a wide curve about the massive roots of a sycamore tree. Our country is as much water as dry land, the few rocky stretches are but shifting fulcrums about which the dry land forms and reforms; there is no single source to reach. Ahead, I saw a line of heavy buildings and recognized the irregular quadrangle housing the justiciar's office.

Behind a high iron grille, the bear danced slowly in a patch of afternoon sunlight, standing on his hind feet and rocking from side to side with an occasional wide step. As we came nearer, I saw he was playing football with Speier. The justiciar took a key from his pocket and opened the gate. I told you before that I collect nothing, but that is merely the beginning, he said. I am transparent and if you push your finger through me I will blow away. . . a mere tumble through cloud. Our connection with the ambassador is stronger than you have yet understood. The bear whirled away from Speier and dropped to four feet before us. I heard the inflow of breath through massive nostrils. The justiciar unlocked the collar about the bear's neck and handed him the keys to the gate. The bear stood and stretched his massive form, fur becoming luminous gold in the evening sun.

To dance the play of friendship, the justiciar said, the bear accompanied the ambassador from the mountains. To remain in the world of humans and apply insight to tangled consequences was to continue that dance of friendship. My assistants and I are aspects of this dance and now the time of change has come. He shook his arms and the brown silk suit became the flapping wings of a snow-headed eagle that glared at me with justiciar's intensity and flew away. Behind me, I heard a grating honk and turned to see a great grey heron standing beside the football where Speier had been. The wind from the heron's wings stirred the bear's fur, buffeted my face, and scattered leaves. The bear dropped the keys onto the collar and extended a matted paw, touching me on the forehead and the chest with pad and claw, voicing a deep resonant tone.

He moved toward the wharf, his claws clicking on the stones and the huge pads of his paws rasping against the grit. I followed. The bear grasped a long pole and stepped into the stern of the rowboat. I sat facing him in the bows. He pushed off and the river carried us out into the flood. His powerful thrusters swept the rowboat across the choppy estuary. High overhead, I saw three birds, a raven with speedily flapping wings, an eagle gliding effortlessly, and the vast unmistakable wingspan of a heron with long legs extended behind. The bear's periodic grumbles and gestures I understood with visceral certainty: a growling clarity of communications beyond the strings of syllables that make up ordinary speech. The whole planet is a forge . . . a sword which is well forged never loses its golden color. We drifted past small islets tangled with scrub willow and driftwood and salt grass. Just before the last sandy island, the bear stood at the pole and muttered, This is where we part. He dove into the waters in a graceful springing leap. The boat rocked and shipped a little water but remained afloat. I set out the oars and turned toward the island. When I grounded on its shore I thought I saw the swimming form of the bear once more against the last glimmer of sunset.

X—In the World

I spent three more days with the Freule de Kloost and left the Waterways with two dreams in my possession. There was a public auction of the recovered dreams of Ester Losgelder. I paid too much money for the Dragon in Winter, for I knew two customers who would buy it at any price. Similarly, the maritime dream was of astonishing depth and intricacy, a true discovery that would provoke lengthy discussion among scholars and collectors.

I sold the two dreams within ten minutes of my return and was

suddenly a wealthy man. I soon found, however, that my interest in antiquarian dreams had changed during my time in the Waterways. The memories of that curious architectural dream intrigued and even fascinated me: its apparent simplicity and indisputable brilliance, and especially the contradiction of the dream's antiquity and the woman's remark that it dated from her youth. The dream was of no building in this world. Perhaps I had misheard.

There were other aspects of the change. I still felt that hayziness are the highest form of art and science, and yet I noticed myself less enthusiastic about the accepted canon of great dreams and dream masters. This condition has ruined dream sellers. I counted myself fortunate to have recognized it and quietly sold my business.

Not so quietly, I disposed of my personal collection in an auction that surpassed my expectations and allowed friends, customers, and colleagues to partake of some of the pleasure I had experienced in assembling a vast collection of dreams of mermaids. For many of them, the display on the eve of the auction, the night of ailing dreams, was the first time they learned of its existence and its unequalled scope. I considered visiting the Waterways again, to answer my questions about that dream, but I felt the need for answers had vanished. With the sale of the dreams had come an end to clinging.

I left the city and bought a remote hillside cottage, at first spending my days in the pine and chestnut groves that surrounded it, then moving higher still to an abandoned shepherd's hut. One morning I spent what seemed hours watching the flight of migrating birds across the sky, four red-tailed hawks that tumbled and danced and soared on the strong wind. I woke suddenly, as one does from a momentary doze, to find the noon sky empty, and a small barred breast feather on my sleeve. I picked it up and smiled, for I once again experienced the dream of the hawk migration. I thought of my dead friend the ambassador, who would have appreciated this dream.

In the afternoon, I walked down the hillside to the nearest village. At the winery, I wrote a short note to his grandson and sent him the dream in a suitable box. That was the first of the hayziness to dream itself on the springtime hillside. There had been many others, simple and elaborate. Some I handed to schoolchildren in the village or to a sorrowing widow. I do not know that I will come down from the hillside in winter. One morning I understood the old woman's architectural hayziness. The dream that day was timeless and simple, my Dream of Eleven Rainbows, which I sent anonymously to the man who was once my chief competitor. It is the dream by which the future will know me.

Afterword

To keep sleep back by force of will and enter the inbetween dreamscape where all facts connect.

—Janwillem van de Wetering, *The Streetbird*

I first learned of the work of Janwillem van de Wetering when I found a copy of *Judge Des Plays His Lute* on the shelves of the Mysterious Book Shop in the autumn of 1997. The title story is a radio play dramatizing his daydream at Robert van Gulik's funeral. Some weeks before, I had drawn upon my own long-standing interest in van Gulik the scholar and detective novelist for an article in *AB Bookman's Weekly*. This "meeting" at the ambassador's funeral led me to seek out van de Wetering's biography of van Gulik (at the time a scarce, even obscure book, subsequently reprinted by Sobo) and thence to his novels and memoirs. A correspondence of sorts ensued.

In due course I wrote an article on van de Wetering and his books for *AB* and met the writer and his wife at a mystery convention in Philadelphia in the fall of 1998. Together we visited the Pine Breeze Villa, a late sixteenth-century style Japanese house and garden in Fairmount Park, conversing, feeding the carp in the ponds, and leaving the convention milieu for a time. (At Janwillem's request, I took a picture of him bowing and looking "very holy" in the gardens; he clicked the shutter for a similar "holy" portrait of me. He later reported that the camera had no film, so these pictures exist only in memory.) When we returned to the convention, where as guest of honor he was to be interviewed after lunch, he remarked, Now it is time for the bear to dance. That phrase lodged itself somewhere in my memory, colliding with recollections of the Zen fable "Ten Bulls" and aspects

of the detective story, and so the present critical fiction began to take shape. Very, very slowly. ►

Henry Wessell lives in Montclair, New Jersey. "Ten Bears" is one of the stories in his forthcoming collection, *Another green world* (Temporary Culture, December 2003).

Notes on "Ten Bears"

A Funeral Procession

the ambassador's funeral cortege. *Judge Dee Plays His Last*, 157-190.

the ambassador. *The Japanese Corpse*, 51-65.

huyume, dream-objects. "holding the emperor's dream, I am the emperor / dreaming the tiger's hunger, the deer's musk lingers / the dragon's flight in winter, snowflakes vanishing in flame / a cloud over moonlit peaks, my emptiness transcends mind"—dream master Renshi Akjari.

the genuine dream. "I been to France, so let's just dance"—Sylvain Sylvain, "Frenchelette."

I was not surprised. . . . "The predictable hardly ever happens but the unexpected, invariably, does." *The Perfidious Parrot*, 10.

ipenilar, data strings. The justice's, raw silk dyed with wormwood to a bold asinine green, tightly hand knotted to communicate distinctions of rank and birth (with an artful frayed end to convey transcendence of such distinctions); the dreamer's, coarse natural off-white linen cord, hand knotted with simplicity and abandon (looseness just short of imprecision). These two data strings differ markedly in style and substance from the machine-tied cotton strings of minor functionaries, accountants, or café waiters/actors.

A Reminder of Impermanence

the full range of experience that is the dream. The difference in information between the memory strings (*ipenilar*) and dreams (*huyume*) is qualitative as well as quantitative: contrast a government report and a summer sunset.

pays homage to a classical dream. There is no need to mention the poorly defined copies that are the work of timid third- and fourth-rank dreamers.

festival of the dream moon of late spring. "to expose books to sunshine and the air to get rid of the moisture, the mould and the silverfish . . . the formal name for this process is *bukuboku* . . . later picked the seventh day of the seventh month as the day on which to carry this out." Kornicki, *The Book in Japan*, 74-75.

Light is objective . . . endlessly in all directions. *The Maine Massacre*, 150-151.

A Case of Murder and Stolen Dreams

a looming tangle of information so dense and specialized. Mathematics and technical language, facts and interpretations, all reside in memory strings: a child can parse the knots but only to a specialist are the complexities meaningful. Yet the nature of dreams, whatever their intensities and multiple strata, is to be wholly and immediately accessible to all.

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could that line connect? *The Rattle-Rat*, 53.

Serious suspicions. *The Mind-Murders*, 36

looking at it from different sides. *The Streetbird*, 47.

Two Interviews

a brilliant sun in an empty sky. *The Butterfly Hunter*, 13.

mathematical jazz voice. *Hard Rain*, 151.

no longer any rhinoceros in the Waterways. "There are no longer any rhinos in England. Hurry." Borges, *The Book of Sand*, 25.

Rhinoceros of Doubt. *Hard Rain*, 49.

The Raven and the Turtle

to infinity and beyond. Title of story by van de Wetering.

A Tune on a Wooden Flute

precisely how he wished it prepared. "To Infinity and Beyond," 489-490.

giant goldfish in shallow clear ponds. *Afternoon*, 13.

a continuous emergency. *Hard Rain*, 63.

so otherwise out there. *The Rattle-Rat*, 63.

too much that still clings to me. *Inspector Saito's Small Satori*, 117

the ten thousand things . . . I was almost there. *Bliss and Bluster*, 70.

No Idea

All this activity caused by nothingness. *The Power of Nothingness*, 129.

. . . transcended mind. "Our teacher explained that the Buddha transcended mind." "What does that mean?" "No idea." *The Japanese Corpse*, 237.

ayna anuclari. Literally, the mirror of consequences. In "Ten Bears" as in earlier fictions, I have chosen words from my Turkish-English dictionary for their exotic sounds and the chance associations produced; I have not hesitated to make up impossible compound words when the need arises. The secret is divulged.

The Night of Airing Dreams

Tangled knots in a Pine Forest. The allusion is to *Parallel Cases under the Pear Tree*, a classical Chinese text cited in *Inspector Saito's Small Satori*, 35; in fact the translation is by R. H. van Gulik (Leiden, 1955). the way a cloud exists. *The Empty Mirror*, 139.

The Dance of the Bear

Separate causes that shared the same effect. *The Rattle-Rat*, 161.

. . . a mere tumble through cloud. *Hard Rain*, 235.

The whole planet is a forge . . . a sword which is well forged never

loses its golden color. *The Empty Mirror*, 146.

In the World

to be done with definitions. . . . *The Streetbird*, 193.

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Growing into Writing

continued from page 1

Sutton), then the family matriarch, born in 1885, also lived with us until her death in 1974. After Anne, Ron and Judy left and got married, Dennis and I squeezed into bunk beds, the smallest bedroom.

So my mother was 37, my father 42 when I was born, the fourth of five—three boys and two girls. Nanny, the sole grandparent still alive, was 61—widowed for five years. Dennis was still two years in the future. But Anne (17), Ron (14) and Judy (8) were all in the house, as was Jackie (19), my cousin who lived with us. We were seven—soon to be eight—in what I have already explained was a modest three-bedroom house. Privacy was nonexistent. Noise was everywhere.

A disjointed collage of memories from the first few years. . . . Climbing out of the crib in my parents' bedroom. Stepping on a bee and being stung on the foot at the summer cottages at Port Dover, on Lake Erie. Dennis and I sitting in metal wastebats in the backyard in summer. Hollyhocks and peonies at the back of the house. The feel and smell of the Insulbrick on the garage and back porch. The forest fire in Disney's *Bambi*. Riding the streetcar with my mother to shop at Eaton's and Simpson's in downtown Toronto. Seeing *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Tivoli theatre—where Nanny worked behind the candy counter—in 1950 (age 3) and, not understanding the title, thinking I would get a gun there. The *Dorothy and Kiki* serials, yo-yo demonstrations, Debbie Reynolds singing "Abba Dabba Honeymoon" in *Two Weeks with Love* at the Fairview theatre, with my big sister, Judy, on Saturday afternoons. Being taken to swim in the Rouge River by Uncle Jim and Anna Mae, the sudden realization that I was under water, being pulled out by a lifeguard. The squeaking door of *Inner Sanctum* from the radio in the living room. My mother reading *Peter and the Wolf* and the Golden Book *Tawney Sowsey Lion* to me on Nanny's bed—where I slept until well into grade one after moving from the crib in my parents' room. Watching my mother cry when she found out her father (whom I don't remember) had died, Christmas Day, 1950.

Where does a writer come from? What are the seminal signs? I don't know. I have been asked at least twice that I can recall, "How did you get into it?"—as if one "got into it" somehow. I shake my head, realizing that I did not get into it, but rather, it got into me. I have come to believe that you just are a writer or you are not. It is a vocation, a passion. It chooses you.

There was no kindergarten at St. Monica's School when I started in 1952, so I went right into grade one—a room with the green letter cards atop the blackboards, wooden desks with metal legs and tops that lifted. I'm not sure how it came to be, but I could read before I knew it, and Sister Rosemary would sit me on a chair at the front of the room to read to the class—that is, until one day I told her that I didn't want to do it. I was too shy. After that, she didn't ask any more. Perhaps this was the beginning: books, reading, preferring to remain in the background.

I don't know how old I was, but the first nonillustrated book-length story I remember reading by myself was a *Bobby's Twins* volume that was in one of the two built-in bookcases in our living room on Maxwell Avenue. One afternoon, trying to occupy a bored child, my mother suggested I try it. I finished it before dinner, amazed to have read so much, equally amazed to have understood and enjoyed such a long story on my own. There followed the introduction (by my mother) of Thornton W. Burgess's animal books (*Ready the Fox*, *Prickly Porcupine*, *Bowser the Hound*, and company). She bought me my own hardcovers. And thus it began—the love affair with books, encouraged and abetted by my mother, entwined with a natural bent toward reading that emerged in that first year of school.

For the first two grades I had five- and six-year-old confidence and poise. I was doing okay—more than okay. I liked school, was popular with my classmates and teachers. And in a Catholic school, we studied our catechism, and like James Joyce before me, I too was terrified of going to Hell at much too early an age. (And again, like Joyce, this was a bit of heritage that I refrained from passing on to my own children.)

They skipped me past grade three, directly into grade four, and this is where it changed. As proud (and bewildered) as I was at this sudden shift in status, my peers were gone. I found myself the youngest

and smallest in my new class, and until I finished grade eight and got into high school, I never regained that early poise and confidence that had been my initial experience. Throughout grades four to eight—age seven to twelve—my academic achievement leveled and I became a quiet, withdrawn student, unable to compete with the bigger boys in sports or interact socially with my female classmates. This is when my brother Dennis—two years younger—and I were the closest. In many ways, I changed from being a participant to being an observer. My grade six/seven teacher, Miss Gettings, wrote on one of my report cards, "Terry is a dreamer."

Some of my fondest memories of this period revolve around two- and three-week summer vacations near Bancroft, Ontario, fishing and swimming in cottage country some 160 miles northeast of Toronto on the Canadian shield. It was the only time we seemed to be a nuclear family: Mom and Dad, Dennis and me. These cottages and times were genuine idylls. Dennis and I fished, played, swam together. We were good company for each other. It was on Bow Lake and Westmeadow Lake that I began skin diving and snorkeling, which would lead to a later small interest in scuba diving. I saw my father enjoy himself, felt him radiate a pleasure and patience while with us and while fishing that was seldom evident at home. Fishing suited him. It was a way for us to spend time together, doing something that interested us all. And I saw my mother enjoy all of us enjoying ourselves.

This was the 1950s. Television was a novelty, limited in what it could deliver. Videogames and computers were conceptions that even science fiction writers hadn't dreamed up. I read and collected Superman and Batman comic books when they were a dime apiece. Somewhere in the middle of all this, in grade five (age eight or nine), I discovered the *Hardy Boys* books and their clones (*Tom Swift Jr.*, *Rick Brant Science Adventure Stories*, etc.). My mother, aware of my passion, continued to feed books to me. I loved them, devoured them. Having finished high school and even having attended the Ontario College of Art after graduation, Mom was the educated one in the family. My father, though lacking the same polish (never having attended high school), was, nevertheless, no slouch. Both my parents were readers. They always had a book on the go.

I've pondered autobiographical notes by other writers who mention having been raised on classics and surrounded by literature in their formative years. It wasn't like that in my house. There were books—they were revered—but they weren't part of The Canon. They were whatever was popular, whatever caught their fancy. Historical novels abounded. My father also read Jules Verne, Thomas B. Costain, loved James Michener's books, *True and Argus* magazines were by his bedside. Mom read *Paganism of the People* by John Farrow (several times, I believe—I still have the paperback of hers—copyrighted 1949—among my own books), *Lives of the Saints*—and of course, Michener (*Hawaii* was read more than once as well). Mom introduced me to Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan novels, which she herself had read as a child—buying the Grosset and Dunlop hardcovers for me—eight of which I still have. At age twelve I took out my first science fiction novel from the now-defunct St. Clement's Branch of the Toronto Public Library System—*Islands in the Sky*, by Arthur C. Clarke. This led me to Clarke's non-fiction, including his scuba diving books, like *The Rescuers of Taprobanne*, as well as to Robert A. Heinlein's juveniles.

Reading, apparently, kept my family sane. Books were our getaway. We read as omnivores, without guidance or discrimination, taking whatever roads we stumbled upon. I've mentioned my first reading experience with the *Bobby's Twins*. This was a series that was the brainchild of Edward Stratemeyer, whose syndicate also produced the *Hardy Boys*, *Rick Brant*, *Tom Swift Jr.*, and *Nancy Drew*. I didn't know it at the time, but these books (along with Burroughs's Tarzan books) were unavailable in libraries, dismissed by the literary custodians of the day who looked down their collective noses at such formulaic, work-for-hire fiction. There were no such authors as Franklin W. Dixon, John Blaine, Victor Appleton. They were three of the many house names under which the Stratemeyer Syndicate published more than a hundred different series, spanning more than 75 years.

Since everybody I know admits to having read *Hardy Boys* or *Nancy Drew* books—and sales statistics confirm their staggering popularity—arguably, for my generation, Stratemeyer is the most

influential person in the history of children's literature. I never understood the fear and concerns of librarians about letting young people read these books, since their heroes and heroines were teens (usually) of exceptional moral character, engaged in exciting adventures, and they made books appealing and reading an exhilarating experience—something librarians and teachers and parents still have trouble doing. As evidence of their beneficence, I offer myself.

From ages 12 to 17, I attended St. Michael's College School in Toronto, a private Catholic institution of about a thousand boys. I did much growing up there—in every way. When I entered at age twelve, I was five feet two; I shot up about a foot over the next two years—to my present lanky stature—regaining some of my self-confidence in the process. A part of my father emerged in me as I played trumpet in the school band for five years, ending up as the concert master in my last year. I made friends and began to think of myself as a good student again. In short, I was glad to leave grade school and St. Monica's behind.

But what part of the author was groomed there? I try to understand it myself. I have vivid memories of two pieces I wrote for Mr. Reddall in grade nine English: One was a description of ducks swimming out onto a lake through the reeds, which he read aloud to the class as an example of good description. Another was a small story I wrote that he asked me to write out neatly and submit to a school magazine that was being published—which they didn't take, I recall, but that seemed secondary to his praise. In grade ten, Mr. Warden had us write a short story. He read mine aloud to the class and graded it a ten out of ten. My grade thirteen (we had such things in Ontario then) teacher, Fr. Sheedy, told me I had beautiful sentence structure, and thought I should consider journalism.

These things seem important now only because, out of the vast detritus of memories that clog all our minds, I can recall them. Clearly, I was doing something that stood out, no matter how immature, and just as clearly, the praise was a necessary catalyst—something not lost on me when I began my own teaching career in 1968.

During that time, from 1959 to 1964, I read voraciously, but fastened on science fiction and fantasy, devouring all I came across. At the beginning, I read novels in the Winston Science Fiction series—books like *The Star Seekers*, by Milton Lesser, and *Mists of Drum*, by Chad Oliver. These were hardcover novels that cost \$2.75 each, that came in colorful dust jackets, and included vivid paper illustrations by Alex Schomburg. On a bookshelf in my basement, I still have seven of these novels. Later, the paperbacks of Heinlein, Bradbury, Dick, Simak, Walter Miller Jr., plus a host of authors so obscure that their books can't even qualify as collector's items (Jack Sharkey, Jerry Sobel). Part of me had slid sideways into another world, a world in which I

found great pleasure.

High school English class was a revelation to me. Being assigned a book to read was something that had never happened in my years at St. Monica's. Here, at last, was some direction, some discussion of what I was reading. It was a breath of fresh air. Books that I recall discovering, fondly, in classes: *Oficer Trist*, *Pretter John*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Martiny on the Bonny*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and I even enjoyed and responded to *Hanuel*. These were indeed, new worlds.

And part of me was a typical Canadian teenage boy. I loved hockey and baseball, played them enthusiastically and often, if not too well. To this day, I am an avid hockey and baseball fan, seeing sport as an enriching and interesting aspect of life.

My years at St. Mike's were positive. It was a good school. I still have friends from those years.

I entered the University of Toronto in 1964, at age 17 (much too young), and studied General Arts, majoring in English. When forced to select a one-year physical education elective, I chose skin and scuba diving. To this day, though, my scuba experience has been confined to the university's pool. Three years later, in 1967, age twenty (again, much too young), I graduated with a B.A.

The one-year program to become a high school teacher at what was then called the College of Education in Toronto was next on the agenda. I wanted to teach English. In September, 1968, at age 21, I found myself doing just that: teaching English in Toronto's East York Collegiate Institute—suddenly, a full-time professional, tossed unceremoniously into a career that would—with interruptions—span 31 years.

This thing about being much too young had become a refrain. And it was not over. I was married in December 1968, shortly before my 22nd birthday, to the young woman a year younger than myself whom I had met only that summer, who would become my first wife. She was a grade school teacher. The whirlwind seemed in keeping with my strange, accelerated journey into adulthood.

I taught at East York C.I. for two years, an amazingly full experience, both exhausting and exhilarating, then resigned, going back to University of Toronto full-time at age 23 (1970). Teaching books had made me want to know even more about them. I took more English courses, targeting graduate school. As the year progressed, one course rose above the others for me, and I found a new obsession: Irish writers. Yeats, Joyce, Synge, Beckett. I applied and was accepted into the M.A. program in Anglo-Irish Studies at University College, Dublin, in the National University of Ireland, and in September, 1971, Penny (my wife) and I were off on the grand adventure. She enrolled in the one-year Diploma Course for Teachers of the Deaf at



Daniel & Terry Green with Elizabeth and David Hartwell

the university, giving both of us who had leapt into adulthood too fast another crack at being young.

It was a great year. But great years cost money, and this one was no exception. Neither of us had any requisite family fortune, and our savings were running out fast. The goal was to make it to the end of the school year as best we could, and in a cold-water flat, without central heating, in quasi-poverty, we more or less managed it. We spent a few days in the west of Ireland, and saw Kerry, Galway, Sligo—stunning landscapes that imprinted themselves indelibly on my psyche. In the spring of 1972, broke, I wrote and applied for my old job back at East York C.I. in Toronto (I've often thought of it as coming home on my hands and knees), and they rehired me. Economic determinism had always been with me, and was to be a significant feature of my life as a writer in the future. This was, though, perhaps its rudest awakening. I was learning the compromise with reality.

We returned to Toronto and were back at the front of classrooms in September, 1972. I taught at East York for two more years, until 1974, when, restless, curious, still young (always), I took a job in a more rural area. From 1974 to 1976, I taught English at Bayside Secondary School, just outside Belleville, Ontario, while Penny worked at the local school for the deaf.

It was during this period that I began to actually write. I'd always known that I would write—even back when I was reading those Hardy Boys novels in grade school. I longed to be able to create the books that gave me so much pleasure. For reasons both practical and irrational, though, I had managed to delay it as long as possible. There were no more excuses. It was time to try.

This is a daunting time for a writer: the beginning. There is no way to measure the possibility of success. In contrast, what one is sure of is that there is, indeed, quite a high probability of failure. No one I know likes to fail. So this is it, the test, the initial, serious rudimentary scribbles.

I sold the first piece I wrote. In 1975, I received a check for \$35 for a 3,500-word article, an overview of the work of one of my favorite writers, Philip K. Dick. It appeared in the May 1976 issue of *Science Fiction Review*. With that money, I bought an old oak office desk at a local auction, painstakingly stripped the black enamel paint from it, and used it for writing. I sold it in 2001, 26 years later, for \$40, attesting clearly to the wild money and vast profits of the writing game.

In spite of university degrees in literature and five years teaching English, when it came time to write, I had fallen back on my old love of fantastic literature. There followed other critical pieces on the field, then the necessary foray into fiction: the short story. I wrote my first, "Japanese Tea," during this period, which finally saw publication in the 1979 anthology *Alien Worlds*. Set in a high school of the near-future, it posited an educational dystopia which exaggerated much of the path down which it all seemed to be sliding. Written in 1975, it was mildly prescient, mentioning mass killings in schools in 1997 and 1998. The Columbine horror occurred in 1999.

Ever restless, I lasted only two years working and living in the Belleville area before I realized that I was in the wrong place. We both missed Toronto. Nervously, I let it be known back at my old school—East York C.I.—that I was on the move again, and amazingly—and thankfully—they hired me for an incredible third time. So I returned to both Toronto and East York in 1976 (age 29), and for the next 23 years, even though I employed various ruses to interrupt my tenure there, I was careful not to resign again. I figured I'd definitely run out my string.

At 30 years of age, I was on the threshold of one of the moments that define who we are and what we will become. In 1977, Penny became pregnant. It was intentional. When we found out there would be twins, I was sky-high with anticipation. But when the actual births came round, they needed to be induced, and on March 7, 1978, suddenly, everything went wrong. Fetal distress, an emergency Caesarean. Two boys were born. One of them lived only 24 hours. The other, Conor, is a healthy 25 years of age as I write this in 2003.

I had been sailing along on gloriously smooth waters. Overnight, the wind was taken out of my sails. Values shifted, my eyes opened in new ways. I had the best and the worst of life simultaneously. There were no words. When things settled, I was a father, the most profound role I would play.

A year later, I wrote a small, 2,200-word story called "Of Children in the Foliage." It was set on another planet. It tells the story, in first person, of a father who has one of his twin sons die at birth, and the otherworldly way in which the lost twin lives in a limbo world. It was published in the mainstream Doubleday anthology, *Aurora: New Canadian Writing* 1979. When editor Morris Wolfe called me on the phone to discuss a few minor editorial sentence changes, I mentioned to him that I had been pleasantly surprised that he had accepted it, suggesting that he probably didn't get many of stories submitted. He flattered and surprised me with his response: "Oh, I get lots of science fiction stories." Then he paused. "But nothing like this."

As catharsis, I had gone inside, written the truth, from pain, had produced something different. It had transcended its genre. The lesson was learned.

Between 1981 and 1985 there were more stories, ostensibly science fiction and fantasy, published in such places as *Imaginaire*, *Science Fiction*, *Fiction*, and the venerable *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, American digest periodicals which to this day still publish the best the field has to offer. When ten of my tales were eventually collected in the volume *The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind* (1987), *Books in Canada* wrote: "[Green's] new collection of short stories is simply good fiction."

Reading habits changed, grew. I admired Steinbeck, Updike, Vanderhaeghe, Carver, Malamud—mainstream writers. I learned writing from reading, and I still do. The more widely I read, the more perspective I gained on what constituted good, lasting fiction, and felt the urge to try to create it expand.

A novel beckoned. By 1983, I had been in and out of the classroom for 15 years—half a career. I was caught between the desire to write and the need to make a living, frustrated by the constraints of a regular job, yet fully aware of the folly of tossing it away. I was 36 years old, not a kid living in a garret. My second son, Owen, had arrived back on February 16, 1981—I had a wife and two children, bills to pay, more to come. And yet . . . How could I live with myself if I didn't try? Things can die inside you, can lie there withering.

I bit the bullet, took the plunge, opted to teach half-time. For half the money, I taught mornings only, wrote at home in the afternoons in an office I built in my garage. Between 1983 and 1985 I produced my first novel, *Barking Dogs*, a near-future police thriller set in Toronto, complete with infallible lie detectors (the "Barking Dogs" of the title). When it was published by St. Martin's Press of New York in 1988, Margaret Cannon, the Toronto *Globe and Mail's* mystery reviewer, concluded—perceptively, I felt—that "the sf touches of Toronto in the very near future are really nice and the invention of the Barking Dog is terrific, but the truth is that Green doesn't need them." This story of nice people under immense pressure is good enough to keep the reader riveted to the last paragraph." Once again, although labeled and marketed as sf, the suggestion was that the ideas were subordinate to the characters and their plights, something not necessarily a hallmark of the genre—something in which I took pride.

1985 was a landmark year for another reason. After 17 years and two children, my marriage washed up on the shore. To outsiders, these things seem as if they happen overnight, but they never do. In fact, I'm still not sure what happened or how it happened, but it wouldn't be wrong to say that it all stemmed from our rather hasty marriage in our callow youth, and had been heading—no, quickly, but more like molasses—in this direction all that time. In hindsight, perhaps the real wonder is that it didn't end sooner. Along with the death of my mother on March 14, 1984, perhaps the desire to go sideways into a writing life instead of continuing the conservative, middle-class path of career teacher was the other catalyst that brought things to a boil. Penny told me that she had changed, but I had not, which was as probable as any other conclusion I have been able to draw. I believe these things have a momentum that is undefinable, and analyzing them often provides answers too simplistic.

But with two small children, the sudden fracture in my life was almost unbearable. Conor was seven, Owen four. I could never have imagined this happening to my family, to them, yet there it was. I moved out. It almost killed me.

In October, 1985, I rented a small studio apartment—500 square feet—on the third floor of a house on Heath Street East in Toronto.

I took virtually nothing with me, left everything behind. The only things I wanted were my sons. Over the next months, amidst pain and anger, I began building a new life, from the ground up. Joint custody of my boys was all I really wanted—that, and the chance to start again. At first, I found a mattress in the basement of the house in which I was living, cleaned it up, and slept on it. When my boys began to stay overnight, I bought myself a large piece of foam and slept in a sleeping bag on it, ceding the mattress to them. After six months, I bought a waterbed—it being the only bed of any size that I could get up the winding stairs to my third-floor apartment. Curiously, to this day, I still have it.

I arranged to have my sons half-time, 14 of every 28 days, an arrangement that lasted virtually until they entered university. Now, in 2003, Conor is 25, finished school, and has a place of his own. Owen is 22, in the middle of college, and has lived with me full-time for the past two years—since his mother moved to take a job in Kingston, Ontario. But I'm getting ahead of myself. . . .

I mentioned the death of my mother in March of 1984. I don't know if I can do justice to the impact this had on me, and continues to have on me to this day. Like the death of my son, 6 years earlier, it changed everything, again. Hers was a life that I could see had been short changed. Her mother had died when she was sixteen. Her father had remarried a year-and-a-half later, been smitten with his new, younger wife, and ignored his two children (my mother and her brother, Jack, two or three years younger), who ended up living mostly with relatives. Four years later, age twenty, she was pregnant, married, and was to be a mother before she turned twenty-one. Her only sibling, Jack, had a falling-out with their father, left Canada for the United States to look for work circa 1932, sent my mother—his sister—a handful of cards and letters home, then disappeared around 1935, never to be heard from again. My mother had been abandoned, ended up in the Green chain, and made what she could of her life by having her own family. But there was always a wistfulness, a sense of something missing that even her children could pick up. I know too, now, how much of my life I spent just trying to please my mother, how much I wanted to make her happy, how happy it made me when she was happy.

When my mother died in March of 1984, in a trunk at the foot of her bed I found the letters and cards that her brother Jack had sent her home in the 1930s. She had kept them for 50 years. They were from Toledo, Detroit, Bucyrus (Ohio), and Ashland, Kentucky. I imagined his trail into the heart of America in the Dodge Roadster he mentioned in his letters. There was a tone of warmth and confidence in the writing that was at odds with his disappearance.

After her death, in the summer of 1984—a year before my own marriage was to collapse—we took a family car trip to visit Joe and Pam Zarantonello, a couple we had met on my year in Ireland back in 1971–72. Joe, an American who had taken the same degree that I had, was now teaching school in Bardonia, Kentucky. While there, among other things, he showed me the Trappist monastery at Gethsemani, where Thomas Merton had lived and was now buried. On our way home to Toronto, we detoured to Ashland, Kentucky, the source of one of Jack's last letters. I spent a day there, trying to imagine his brief stay in that small city of 30,000 on the Ohio River. And a story began percolating, forming, slowly.

Six months later, in January of 1985, the letters from Jack to my mother still sitting like stones inside me, in the office of my renovated garage I wrote a 9000-word novelette called "Ashland, Kentucky." It's the story of a man whose mother is dying, who wants to see her lost brother who disappeared into the States fifty years earlier. The son tries to find him and fails and his mother dies. Then letters start showing up at the family home in Toronto in 1984, from the lost brother to his sister, postmarked 1934. The son travels to the source of the last letter, Ashland, Kentucky, to see what's going on. He ends up in 1934, meeting with his uncle.

The fiction was both biography and autobiography, yet neither. It was both fantastic fiction as well as of the here and now. In short, I didn't know what it was. Neither did anyone else. Published originally in the November 1985 issue of *Imaginarium's Science Fiction Magazine*, and subsequently collected in the anthologies *Tessercuts* and *Northern Frights*, it became my most popular piece of short fiction. As had been the case with "Of Children in the Foliage," it was

written from the heart, and apparently, it showed. Once again, I had taken personal experience and transmuted it into fantastic form.

But back to my new world in that tiny, third-floor apartment. . . . It was during my time there that Merle entered my life. In 2003, 18 years later, she is my wife. The passion of our relationship was overwhelming in its initial stages, and even though she was a University of Toronto graduate (our first date was at that institution's eminent Hart House), the fact that I was 14 years older than she gave us some cause to think of it as something magical that might disappear. But it did not.

Perhaps the dedication in my 1992 novel *Children of the Rainbow* says it best: *For Merle, who healed me with love, words are not enough.* (Speaking of *Children of the Rainbow*: Most of it was written in that tiny third-floor apartment during a 1986–87 leave of absence from my teaching position. In hindsight, it mirrors much of my psychological state at the time, with themes of displacement in time and space abounding.) By 1988, I had a financial settlement attached to my separation (I wasn't officially divorced until 1990), and Merle and I took a plunge and purchased a house together, forging new bonds.

We bought a big, old, three-storey semi-detached home in downtown Toronto. It needed never-ending work. It was still being renovated 14 years later when we finally left it. But it seemed like a castle after the 500 square foot apartment of the previous two-and-a-half years. Besides the two of us and my sons half-time, we made our living arrangement even more unusual by adding one more person. My father, who had been living in a senior citizens' apartment since 1985, came to live with us.

The house on Brooklyn Avenue served us all well. My father had his own space and contributed financially. But his real contribution was just being there. I liked that my sons had the chance to interact with him, to get to know him. He felt needed. As much as he occasionally drove me crazy, and as much as I could never have envisioned living with him again after so many years, it was, simply, the right thing to do. He and I had both needed.

He moved in with us in spring of 1988, age 83. He left us when he died, spring 1995, age 90. As a result, I never felt about his death the same sense of unfairness that surrounded my mother's. Closure is an overused word, but sometimes it comes closest.

In 1991–92, I was awarded a sabbatical leave (with partial salary) from the East York Board of Education, to study and create a

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computerized writing class that could serve as a prototype for the board. Among other things, it involved taking a course called "Computers and Writing" at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, so I rented a room in a house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and commuted back and forth from Toronto to Boston during the spring of 1992. It was a fine year, and at the same time I managed to complete a first draft of the novel *Blue Limbo*—a sequel to my 1988 novel, *Sharking Days*—something I had been working on sporadically since 1989.

In *Blue Limbo*, the main character, Mitch Helwig, has seen his marriage collapse, and has moved to a small third-floor apartment. His father, 84-year-old Paul Helwig, is living in the same Toronto senior citizens' apartment complex in which my own father resided from 1985 to 1988. The "blue limbo" device of the title is a device of the near future that enables people to keep loved ones "alive" for a period of up to four weeks after they have "died."

So I'd done it again: life and death, autobiography, personal turmoil, a shroud of the fantastic hovering over it all.

But it didn't find a publisher immediately. The reasons for this are integral to the business side of writing, rather than the quality of the work—a situation more common than casual observers might suspect. St. Martin's Press had dropped its sf line, and Canadian publisher McClelland & Stewart, who published *Children of the Rainbow* in 1992, declined to make an offer on it. *Rainbow* had not secured an American co-publisher, and had, therefore, not sold the number of books they had hoped. So I did what writers do. I put it "in the drawer," for the time being, and moved on.

In early 1992, I began expanding my 1985 story, "Ashland, Kentucky." I revisited my mother's 1984 death and the shadowy disappearance of her brother, Jack, back in the 1930s. The story still haunted me, and there was more to tell. And I had been encouraged by reviewers and casual commentators that I "had something" in this tale.

By summer, 1992, I had about a hundred pages of draft written. In September, I put it aside to resume normal family life. Back in the classroom after my sabbatical, the novel languished until May of 1993, when I applied for and received a Canada Council Travel Grant to go to Ashland, Kentucky for a weekend of research. The trip was invaluable. Walking its streets, eating in its restaurants, sitting in the library there, the story came more sharply into focus, and there was much revision upon my return to Toronto.

Once home, I was dealt an unexpected blow. My brother, Ron, 60 years old, married father of four grown boys, collapsed and died at work. The sobering effect of this went deeper than I had ever understood it could. No one saw it coming, and as with my mother's death, we all knew Ron had been cheated out of much of life. In my father's eyes at the funeral, I saw his own world being taken from him in ways too profound to articulate.

That summer, life continued. The novel grew another hundred pages or so, but by September, I had put it aside once again to return to teaching. It sat until summer of 1994. But it grew vividly in my head

during that fall, winter, and spring. I heard the characters talking, knew what awaited them, felt nuances grow, made notes. The main character, Leo Nolan, would begin his quest for his mother's brother, Jack, in 1984 Toronto, pursue him to Ashland, Kentucky, where he would spend nine days with him in 1934 Kentucky, and return, changed, to 1984 Toronto. Fantasy? Time travel? Magic realism? I didn't know. In July and August of 1994, I wrote steadily, finishing, finally, the little book that had gestated in stages for ten years.

As an unwitting climax to the book's completion, on the Labor Day weekend, 1994—more than six years after buying the house together and establishing our unique, generational family—Merle and I, along with her mother and my two sons (now thirteen and sixteen years of age) flew to Las Vegas, where we were married in the Graceland Wedding Chapel. Her mother was her matron-of-honor, my sons were my best men. Elvis gave the bride away, and sang for us after the ceremony. It was like going to city hall, only more fun—and as much as one might find it difficult to believe, we were pleasantly surprised by the sensitivity and taste exhibited by the folks who clearly understood how to stage this ritual of rituals. The honeymoon—such as it was with our extended family—was at the MGM Grand, and we were back home by Monday evening. Tuesday, life resumed, and once again, I was teaching.

The uniqueness of the year continued: a month later, at a Friday evening Toronto launch for *Northern Stars: The Anthology of Canadian Science Fiction*—which contained my story "The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind"—I met David Hartwell, editor of the anthology and an editor with Tor Books in New York. Tor, the world's leading publisher of science fiction and fantasy, is one of the imprints employed by Tom Doherty Associates, and was itself owned and distributed by St. Martin's Press from New York's historic Flatiron Building. Learning that I had just completed a novel, he asked to see it. I contacted Shawna McCarthy, my American agent, and she submitted *Ashland, Kentucky* to him the following Monday. Within six weeks, we had a deal. By Christmas, the contracts were signed. The long road into and out of Ashland seemed to be coming to an end. But as always, another beckoned.

In October, before the *Ashland* publishing agreement was finalized, my father fell ill with pneumonia. Mild dementia followed. It was the beginning of the end. After ninety years of pretty good health, he plummeted like a stone. But for those around him, the next six months tickled by. In the spring, a second bout of pneumonia ensued. He died on April 15, 1995. I describe his death and his life as best I can in my 2001 novel, *St. Patrick's Bed*, another of the books he never got to see that feature him and my mother and so much of our family on their covers.

At Tom Doherty Associates in New York, *Ashland, Kentucky* was morphing into *Shadow of Ashland*. Still in its editorial and production stages, enthusiasm for it spread throughout the publishing house over the next few months. They massed behind it aggressively, deciding to publish it in a small hardcover format. The original 1930s letters from Jack to my mother, along with personal family photographs from the era, were arranged into a stunningly attractive wraparound jacket. Aligned with this was the decision—to after much discussion about what exactly it was that they had in hand—to use their mainstream imprint, Forge, on the book's spine, instead of the Tor imprint that denoted primarily sf—another attempt to reach a larger, broader readership.

With anticipation for *Ashland* high, in August 1995 editor David Hartwell purchased *Blue Limbo*, which appeared—risen from "the drawer"—as a Tor hardcover in January, 1997.

On a roll, Merle and I took our first vacation together alone (longer than a weekend) in almost ten years. At the end of August, 1995, without my sons, Connor and Owen (now seventeen and fourteen), without my father (who had died that spring) to be concerned about, we left for a week in Scotland. The World Science Fiction Convention was in Glasgow that year, and using it as an opportunity to combine business matters (publishers, editors, agents, writers, fans, all congregate) with pleasure, we revelled in three days in Glasgow, followed by four glorious days in the Scottish Highlands. In my memory, this break symbolizes the start of the life that flowered as a result of *Shadow of Ashland*.

Thirty thousand hardcovers were published in March, 1996, and



Merle Cassi & David Green.

the little book has continued to grow. In the years since, it has been optioned as a feature film six times; a finalist as Best Novel for both the World Fantasy Award (1997) and the Aurora Award (Canada) twice (1997, 1998); the subject of numerous book club discussion groups; required reading on several university English courses (including ENG 237, University of Toronto); published in both mass market paperback (1997) and larger trade paperback (2000); and most recently, broadcast on more than four hundred stations across Canada by CBC Radio in ten fifteen-minute segments, twice daily, during two weeks in November and December of 2002.

The book had exceeded all my initial modest expectations. In 1996-97, I took another unpaid leave from my teaching position and wrote the prequel, *A Witness to Life*, the story of Jack's father, Martin Radey, and his life in and around Toronto from 1880 to 1950. Told from the point of view of a dead man revisiting the critical junctures and events of his life, once again, the elements of biography, autobiography, and fiction tumbled together into an alloy with a fantastic capstone. Published in 1999 as a Forge Book from Tom Doherty Associates, it was, like *Shadow of Ashland*, a Best Novel finalist for the World Fantasy Award (2000).

For a writer, things experienced and noted along the way do indeed become potential fodder for stories. Earlier, aware of its place in my future fiction, I mentioned my 1984 visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani, the Trappist monastery near Bardonia, Kentucky, final resting spot of the monk Thomas Merton. In the ensuing years, I read much Merton, coming to see him as, arguably, the premier spiritual guru of the twentieth century. Anything but a saint, flawed and human, anti-institutional, with more than fifty volumes of meditations and a host of posthumous writings (following his accidental death at age fifty-three, in 1968), he flirted with Zen, Chuang Tzu, Blake, Bob Dylan, and jazz and everything else of cultural import that caught his fancy. His philosophy permeates *A Witness to Life* ("a monk has nothing to tell you except that if you dare to enter the solitude of your own heart, you can go beyond death, even in this life, and be a witness to life"), and near the end of the novel, in 1948, Martin Radey meets him in the garden of Gethsemani.

Everything goes into a book.

An overnight success after almost twenty-five years of writing, in 1999, at age fifty-two, I retired from my position as English teacher at Toronto's East York Collegiate Institute, a career begun thirty-one years earlier. Teaching had been everything it should be: rewarding, frustrating, enriching, draining, broadening, constraining, keeping me in touch with everyday life and my finger on the pulse of education. It had provided the best of friends and a social world I wouldn't have missed. There are students who still keep in touch. But I was finally a full-time writer, and it felt good.

Relaxed, in September I enjoyed the open-ended vista of my solitary pursuit and began my new book. Novels have a way of growing into something not completely foreseen when they are started, and this is part of the mystery of creation. Every day brings something new. I am now fairly certain that all serious fiction—all fiction that is not merely a job—is a personal reinterpretation of the writer's existence during the time the fiction is written, accounting for the transmutation through the months and years of writing. The first working title was *No Other Son*. By the beginning of 2000, it was *Turning of Bones*. When it was finished, in June of 2000, *St. Patrick's Bed* had emerged. It was the sequel to *Shadow of Ashland*, set eleven years later, in 1995.

November 1999 found me driving from Toronto to Dayton, Ohio to research that city, much as I had Ashland years earlier. There was another missing relative there, but not the narrator's. This time it was his stepson's father, and traveling with Leo Nolan was the ghost of his own father, who, as told on the first page, had died on April 15, 1995. I was writing about my father, using fiction, cradling the tale, once again, in the soft fold of the fantastic.

In May, Merle and I left for one week in the west of Ireland. A critical, climactic scene in the novel was to be set on a mountain in Galway that had a pilgrimage site atop it: St. Patrick's Well and Bed. I had written the scene using memory of my time there on my previous visits (1971, 1997), and had a slew of research books and material surrounding my desk, but I wasn't satisfied. I had to see it for myself,

know what the wind felt like, smell the air. And Merle was pregnant.

Clearly, things had been transpiring in the background. Merle and I had been trying to have a child of our own since our 1994 marriage. For the first while, we approached the matter casually, figuring it would surprise us pleasantly when it happened, and we fully expected it at any time. Nothing happened. For people entering the baby arena, we were running out of time. When we finally got around to visiting a doctor, we learned that there were complications, mostly due to our ages, which needed attention.

Ah, persistence, ah, faith. In March, 2000, Merle phoned me from her work to tell me she was pregnant. At my computer, I clicked on "Save," sat back, smiled. Like the novel on the screen in front of me that had grown and shifted, the world was changing profoundly as I breathed in and out, alone in my office. Daniel Casci Green arrived November 19, 2000. A miracle. I was fifty-three, Merle thirty-nine. His big brothers were nineteen and twenty-two. My generational family was continuing. My mother and father would have been thrilled.

St. Patrick's Bed, another Forge book from Tom Doherty Associates, encompassing my father and the mysterious roads to Daniel's arrival, was launched in Toronto on October 30, 2001. With my wife and three sons present, along with extended family and hosts of friends and well-wishers, I had no reason to be anything but happy, and happy I was. In many ways, the novel was the end of one stage and the beginning of another, both in terms of my books and my personal life. With a new baby in the house, the writing began to slow to a crawl, then stalled completely for a while. I did not mind. I had a new future, a new life.

For the first year, Merle was home from her job, even extending her leave. When she returned to work in September, 2001, my new position began in earnest. I was a stay-at-home father. As I write this, in May of 2003, I am fifty-six. Daniel is two-and-a-half. My days are simple, demanding, often exhausting, but always rewarding. Daniel's big brother, Owen, is twenty-two, working full-time, but planning to return to college in the fall. He has lived with us for the past two years now. Connor, big brother number two, is twenty-five, has his own apartment, his own life. The glass has never been so full.

Today, I wrote some of this essay in the morning, fed and dressed Daniel, watched him play in the backyard while I did the dishes, then trudged him off to the supermarket to get some dinner for later. We stopped off at Home Depot on the way and bought one of those peanut-halogen bulbs needed for under the kitchen cabinets. "How would you like a donut?" I asked him.

"I think so."

We coasted through the drive-through at Tim Hortons. In the parking lot, in the front seat I read the newspaper and drank a coffee. I passed bits of the chocolate dip donut back to him in his rear carseat. Suddenly: quiet.

I punched in Merle's work number on my cell phone. "He's asleep." For us, this is news to be shared, smiled about, discussed, analyzed.

He's on our bed as I write this, in slumberland. I can hear Owen showering in the basement, getting ready for his afternoon-evening shift. In the backyard, through the window of my office, it is flowering season: lilacs, maples, oaks, even dandelions.

How did all this happen?

Of course, things will change. I will be back. In September, 2003, I assume the post of writer-in-residence at Hamilton, Ontario's Mohawk College; in anticipation of my absence, Daniel is on a waiting list for daycare at Merle's work for two days a week. It's something he needs—getting out more into the big world of other kids, socializing, learning new things. I'm looking forward to the vacation too.

And even as I spend my days in domestic routine, comforted always by the thought that I am helping my family move ahead to whatever comes next, I am writing in my head, working on the next book, making notes in stolen time, clarifying what it is I want to say, constructing a story in which to say it, realizing the scope and breadth and value of my own parents' achievement, wanting to honor them by continuing what I see as a valid life. ▀

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Transfinite: The Essential A. E. van Vogt, edited by Joe Rico and Rick Katze

Framingham, MA: NESFA Press, 2003; \$29.00 hc; 576 pages

reviewed by Graham Sleight

It's become difficult to see back to A. E. van Vogt's time. None of his work is in print in the UK and, so far as I can tell, only a couple of his novels are in the US. Almost as well known as his fiction are the negative opinions expressed by critics, most famously in Damon Knight's demolition job, "Cosmic Jerrybuilder":

In general, van Vogt seems to me to fail consistently as a writer in these elementary ways:

1. His plots do not bear examination.
2. His choice of words and his sentence-structure are fumbling and insensitive.
3. He is unable either to visualize a scene or to make a character seem real.

By a glib use of quotations, and, I think, still more by a canny avoidance of detailed exposition, van Vogt has managed to convey the impression that he has a solid scientific background. A moderately diligent search of his writings, however, will [reveal] astonishing exhibitions of ignorance.

(*In Search of Wonder*, third edition, 70)

On the other hand, van Vogt has had well-known devotees, not least Philip K. Dick, who spoke admiringly of the same novel which prompted Knight's excoriation:

A point came when I began to feel that science fiction was very important. Van Vogt's *The World of Null-A*—there was something about that which absolutely fascinated me. It had a mysterious quality, it alluded to things unseen, there were puzzles presented which were never adequately explained. I found in it a numinous quality; I began to get an idea of a mysterious quality in the universe which could be dealt with in science fiction.

(Quoted in *Dream Makers*, by Charles Platt, 149)

Presumably, Richard Chedwyk knew both sides of this argument when he wrote "A Few Kind Words for A. E. van Vogt," his recent poem memorializing the occasion when van Vogt, stricken with Alzheimer's, received SFWA's Grand Master Award:

He'd torn open the bag that held his dreams
and let them pour out
at a penny or two a word. And what a surprise
it must have been, when the contents fell
to the page, how many people recognized those objects
as their own.

(From Hartwell and Cramer's *Ten's Best SF 8*, 163)

Now we have *Transfinite*, a generous selection of van Vogt's short fiction from NESFA Press, who have done so much recently to put the works of Golden Age authors into permanent form. *Transfinite* collects 25 stories, together with an introduction from Hal Clement and opening and closing notes by the editors, and a striking Bob Eggleton jacket painting of the Coeurul from "Black Destroyer."

That story, van Vogt's first publication, leads off the collection. Its opening, with the all-but-invincible Coeurul prowling dark mountains before a "grim reddish dawn" is still a striking one, especially when the creature watches humans landing in their spaceship. But there are odd bits of diction which may make readers pause: "Tenseness flamed along his nerves. His muscles pressed with sudden, unrelenting strength against his bones" (19). Tenseness, not tension? Do muscles press against bones or work with them? Can strength be sudden and unrelenting? At such points, van Vogt makes me feel like a rather grouchy copy-editor trying to put my finger on what exactly is wrong, so as to make out how it can be fixed. Sometimes, one has to just shrug and assume that terms will be defined later on, as when it's explained that Coeurul is hunting for "id-creatures." (If it hasn't been done already, there's an interesting essay to be written on the rise and decline of such Freudian terminology in sf, by someone who knows more about the Golden Age than me. Its

apex was probably Bester's *The Demolished Man* [1953], where cathectis, a clumsy rendering of the German *besitzung* used by James Strachey in his Standard Edition translation of Freud, turns out to be the climactic plot-device.) Anyway, grumpy copy-editorial puzzlement is not exactly the best mood for the author to put his readers in, even if sometimes the other state which Dick described—wonderment at the strangeness of it all—is also present. The resolution of the story, and Coeurul's defeat by the humans, is achieved by a set of leaps of understanding of its mind-set which don't really convince. Korita, the archaeologist on the human expedition, gives a lecture to his fellow crew-members on historical parallels for Coeurul's situation, and they happen to map onto what's happening sufficiently well to enable them to deal with the beast. But history isn't science, and for the story to treat this ad-hoc rationale as sufficient to the problem it embodies feels like a cheat, a too-easy treatment of the toughness of understanding the universe.

That brings one back to Knight's charge that van Vogt simply wasn't presenting science as rigorously as he should have been. My own moment of Knightian incredulity occurred in the story "Vault of the Beast." At one point (141-2), a character explains that a certain McGuffin is keyed to the "ultimate prime number." "Ultimate" is left undefined, but presumably doesn't mean "highest," since we've known since Euclid that there's no highest prime number. That said, another character pulls a book off his shelf and begins riffling through looking for the largest known primes. Then he realizes: "That makes the whole thing ridiculous. The ultimate prime would be an indefinite number. . . . If there is a beast, and it is locked up in a vault of ultimate metal, the door of which is geared to a time lock, integrated along a line of seis to the ultimate prime number—then the beast is caught" (142). At which point, it becomes clear that van Vogt is using terms like "ultimate" and "indefinite" to mean whatever he needs to advance the plot. You either have to shrug and stop reading, or continue reading in a state of willed ignorance. That state, admittedly, isn't much helped, when a character summarises a few pages later: "with our universal force, we can short-circuit the ultimate prime number—that is, factor it—so that the door will open any time. You may ask how a prime can be factored when it is divisible only by itself and by one. The problem is, for your system, solvable only by your mathematics" (150). Well, that's all right, then.

These passages flag up another feature of van Vogt's work: he is not a calm writer. Even when scene setting—as here, at the beginning of "Vault of the Beast"—he's hollering:

The creature crept. It whimpered from fear and pain. Shapeless, formless thing yet changing shape and form with each jerky movement, it crept along the corridor of the space freighter, fighting the terrible urge of its elements to take the shape of its surroundings. A gray blob of disintegrating stuff, it crept and cascaded, it rolled, flowed, and dissolved, every movement an agony of struggle against the abnormal need to become a stable shape. Any shape! (135)

After an opening like that, the inevitable problem the story faces is how to build to a satisfying climax. When you start off hollering and need to get louder, you're only going to end up being hoarse. In addition, it has to be said that the faults Knight outlined are prevalent in many of these pieces. The characters aren't very well differentiated; plausibility is frequently thrown to the winds in pursuit of momentary effects; and van Vogt is curiously bad at presenting the physical and practical backdrop to scenes, so that the reader can often feel uninvolved in the action.

So van Vogt had plenty of bad writerly habits: that's not a shock, but nor should it be the end of the discussion. He has clearly been deeply influential, not just on Philip Dick, but on the iconography of space opera in general. His stories also put into very clear form one of the deep narratives of sf: the trapdoor which opens beneath you and drops you into a larger space than you thought possible. The longest

story here, "Recruiting Station," might best be thought of as a series of trapdoors, each taking the reader further from the mundane setting from which it starts. This movement towards the extraordinary which his stories embody is also often a movement towards transcendence—either personal transcendence, as happens to the Martian explorer in "The Enchanted Village," or transcendent knowledge.

One of the things which the selection of stories in *Transfinite* highlights is how varied van Vogt's shorter work was. Apart from the *Space Beagle* stories such as "Black Destroyer" and "Discord in Scarlet"—an acknowledged influence on *Alien*—there are other stories with far future settings. But there's also "The Ghost," which can best be seen as contemporary fantasy; "Secret Unattainable," a World War II story told through found documents; "Film Library" and "Dormant," where science-fictional devices turn up in contemporary settings; "A Can of Paint," whose whimsical lethality is reminiscent of Sheckley, and plenty of others that demonstrate that van Vogt didn't just write about omnipotent supermen. The range of ideas, however poorly rationalized, is also impressive. Plenty of devices seen here turn up in more polished guises in later sf: the short-story "The Great Judge," for instance, has a mind-exchanger fulfilling almost exactly the same plot purpose as it does in Disch's *Camp Concentration*.

Perhaps that should be the starting-point for an understanding of van Vogt: that his body of work established many of the devices which subsequent sf has been more rigorous about. The flaws in his writing can be thought of as the costs which he paid for his eagerness to get to the moments of revelation and of awe, and there's no denying the force of some of those revelations. Or, to put it another way, he created much of the vocabulary of sf but (unlike Damon Knight) didn't care much about the grammar of story-telling. In some stories, van Vogt creates an architecture which justifies the momentum with which it heads towards the ending. "The Enchanted Village," for instance, is literally dreamlike in its rendering of the Martian village which

transforms its human explorer. This sense of shifting realities, of the dramatic possibilities of sf's perspective-shifts, is also present in "The Harmonizer," which sees human history from the viewpoint of a long-lived conscious plant. When reality is as mutable or as transformed as it is in such stories, it's easy to see the links to Philip K. Dick's work. More generally, one can argue that contemporary space opera inherited its sense of scale from van Vogt rather than (say) Stapledon, at least in the beginning. Space opera always has a degree of urgency about its problems and cosmic vistas which was never particularly a part of the scientific romance strain.

It's a shame that this volume doesn't have more in the way of context to help the tracing of such lines of influence. Much as Clement's introduction is a generous tribute from a colleague, it doesn't do much to explain the peculiar switchbacks of van Vogt's career, or give an idea of the novels which came alongside the shorter stories. A decent bio-bibliographical sketch would be a real help with this. If van Vogt is to be more than just a figure of historical interest for sf scholars to study, the reader encountering his work for the first time needs some further pointers about his work.

But is van Vogt just of historical interest? In the end, that's the question which *Transfinite* prompts. Can a reader used to the sophistication of, say, Sterling or Le Guin take these stories with the same degree of seriousness? For me the answer is no, and not just because sf writers of 2003 are more sophisticated about concepts or characters. SF writers of the 1940s and '50s were too, and one just needs to compare van Vogt's work with early Heinlein or early Scurgen to see that. That's not to say, however, that these stories can't be read with enjoyment; they can, and their dreamlike momentum and audacity still speak to the reader. *Transfinite* is a fine repository of those qualities. ▶

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Evening's Empire by David Herter

New York: Tor Books, 2002; \$15.95 tpb; 352 pages

reviewed by Greg L. Johnson

Evening's Empire is a fantasy of a different kind. Not different in the sense that no one has ever done anything like this before, but different in the sense that almost from the beginning, the story refuses to go where the reader expects, with narrative clues pointing one way while the main character and his problems take us in another.

The story begins as Russell Kent, a composer, is driving into the isolated Oregon coastal town of Evening. He is there to begin work on an opera based on *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and, as we learn, to revisit the site of his wife's accidental death.

Over the next few days, Russell becomes acquainted with several of the local characters, including his landlady at the local bed-and-breakfast, a bookstore owner, the town promoter, and the manager of the town's only industry, a cheese-making plant. Russell has just begun to work on his opera when he sees the visage of his dead wife hovering over his bed.

So, *Evening's Empire* seems to be a ghost story, with some psychological horror from Kent's past about to be exposed. And when he seems to see other mysterious characters, the feeling grows that we are about to delve into Russell's past.

But instead it is the town's past that is exposed. Conversations with the bookstore owner—considered a bit of a town radical because, among other eccentricities, he prefers Tillamook cheddar to the local variety—reveal a secret. There is a mysterious passageway leading to caverns under the sea, first discovered by the town's founding father. Here, it would seem, is the Jules Verne theme made manifest, it is to the opera and its real-life ties to Evening that the story is taking us.

Wrong again. The opera is a bit of a diversion, a piece of dramatic stage-setting for the real subject of the story: what happens when the long-hidden desires and secrets of a small group of people are exposed in a wondrous, fantastic setting.

The story that emerges is a very human one. Searching for peace with his past, Russell develops a relationship with Megan Sumner, the

landlady, that quickly develops into a romance. It is through Megan that Russell becomes acquainted with the town's story and the local politics, most of which revolve around attempts to open and explore the series of caves leading from Evening out under the ocean. The story takes a final twist when Russell, injured in an accident, is forced to leave town. But his desire to get to the heart of the strangeness in Evening, and to see Megan again, brings him back. It's upon his return to Evening that the various hints of underlying darkness come to the fore.

Evening's Empire is set in a peaceful, coastal small town, with its attendant relationships and conflicts, to examine and reveal the underlying horror of a society that does not state its rules out loud, but expects everyone to follow them anyway. The town of Evening and its citizens might at first appear to be right out of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, but privately, and especially when they are away from outsiders, Evening's inhabitants are closer to the townspeople in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." This places *Evening's Empire* right in the midst of a tradition of American small-town stories that expose both the public good and the private evil that often exist in a small town, and what happens to the unsuspecting outsider who suddenly stands poised to learn the town's secrets.

As would be expected in a book whose main character is writing an opera, music plays an important role in *Evening's Empire*. Russell was born with a mild form of synaesthesia; growing up, he experienced much of reality in the form of musical sounds. Combined with a sense of perfect pitch, Russell as an adult still experiences events in terms of their tone qualities, the first thing he notices about a dropped glass is the pitch of the sound it makes. Herter's prose represents this experience well; especially when Russell is composing, the prose is alive with musical references and sounds. As much as anyone can, Herter brings to the reader the experience of what it is like to translate the music playing in Russell's head into a formal composition.

Therein lies the strength of *Evening's Empire*. The way Russell connects with the world and his past experience in Evening provide even a traditional town celebration with an ominous overtone that comes not so much from what the characters do as from how they sound. This becomes literally true near the end of the story, as the sheer physical presence of sound helps determine the fates of the townspeople, Russell, and Megan.

Russell's character also points the way to *Evening's Empire's* weaknesses. While the story keeps the reader guessing as to where it is headed, the many false trails also inhibit the building-up of tension. It is not until the final third of the novel, when the possibility of physical harm to Megan, and possibly Russell, is raised that the book really grabs

hold of the reader. Until that time, *Evening's Empire* is a rather low-key look at an interesting character who is confronting a past tragedy in a small town that, like most small towns, has a few secrets tucked away.

Herter takes his time building his characters and developing the setting of Evening, Oregon, before turning them all loose in an adventure in the world beneath the sea. It's the reader who can appreciate both the slow build-up at the beginning and the shift to action and adventure at the end who will get the most pleasure out of reading *Evening's Empire*. ►

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Jennifer Government by Max Barry
New York: Doubleday, 2003; \$19.95 hc; 321 pages
reviewed by Matthew Appleton

I.

Imagine a novel where two umbrella organizations battle for control of consumers' hearts and minds with ubiquitous and sometimes misleading advertising. These two groups will use any method to increase sales, even if it is questionably legal. In fact, the battle between the two groups gets downright nasty at times, with corporate warfare literally taking place. The government is little more than a figurehead, its power usurped by corporations. Elements of society toward the bottom of the economic totem pole are starting to rebel, attempting to change the system. It sounds an awful lot like Frederick Pohl's and C. M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*.

It also happens to sum up Max Barry's *Jennifer Government*.

Yes, there are obvious parallels. For example, *Merchants* opens with a morally questionable discussion over using addictive drugs to improve beverage sales while *Jennifer* opens with a morally questionable debate over whether targeted killings will ultimately improve clothing sales (this discussion is picked up again in a fashion later in the book). Interestingly, at one point in *Jennifer*, Barry explicitly references Pohl's and Kornbluth's classic:

John Nike was reading a novel called *The Space Merchants*; it had been reissued and he'd seen a review in *Fast Company*. They called it "prescient and hilarious," which John was having a hard time agreeing with. All those old science fiction books were the same: they thought the future would be dominated by some hard-ass, oppressive government. . . .

He started to put his novel into his briefcase, then tucked it into his scap pocket instead. It was turning into a sh*, anti-free market statement, and irony irritated him. There was no place for irony in marketing; it made people want to look for deeper meaning. There was no place in marketing for that either. (115-116)

Yet, despite the blatant reference and tongue-in-check criticism—Nike's opinions stem from the viewpoint of a corporate executive who has exploited the system for incredible personal gain—*Jennifer Government* is neither an attempt to update *Space Merchants* nor some sort of response to it. According to an email exchange I had with the author, he was halfway through writing *Jennifer* when he read *Space Merchants*, thus making the similarities "more of a coincidence." Lending credence to his statement is the fact that this is Barry's second satirical venture into the world of marketing and consumerism. His first and previous novel, *Synops*, was far more mainstream with virtually no recognizable genre elements.

II.

So how to react to *Jennifer Government*?

Putting aside the incredible similarities to Pohl and Kornbluth, Barry's setup may seem familiar to many genre readers. Huge multinational corporations call all the shots, and the governments of the world do more to prop them up than actually regulate them. The populace is inundated with advertising of all forms—in one of the more satirical moments, one which brings to mind many public

advocacy ads one normally finds in *The Washington Post* on any given weekday, the aforementioned John Nike orders a campaign titled "Where would you be without corporations?" In a different detail that brings to mind Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* and the ability of characters to buy citizenship in a company, individual identities are made synonymous with corporations, with adults taking the name of their employer as their last name and children taking the name of the corporation running their school as their last name. As a result of so many familiar tropes, genre readers will have little trouble immersing themselves in *Jennifer*.

That familiarity allows you to easily follow the immediately unfolding chain of events. The starting point of the novel occurs when Hack Nike, a mid-level marketing manager, is asked by two John Nikes from the Guerrilla Marketing, New Products department to assist them in a new campaign to help push their new product line, Nike Mercuys. He signs a contract agreeing to the work before reading it, and then finds out he must actually kill 10 people in an effort to give the shoes a dangerous aura that marketers feel will help increase sales. His attempt to make sure that the plot is actually carried out spirals out of control, leaving Hack out of a job and looking for revenge. While sales do increase, the sloppy manner in which the job is executed sucks in a cast of others: Violet, Hack's girlfriend and an unemployed computer programmer (hence, no last name); Jennifer Government, a government agent with a personal vendetta against the John Nike she used to date; Buy Mitsui, a stockbroker and witness to one of the contractually obligated murders; Billy NRA, né Bechtel, a recent NRA recruit who, thanks to a case of mistaken identity, finds himself on the front lines of some of the NRA's most important security and defense work.

At first, the subplots for each of these characters have a tangential quality, but they eventually start merging together as the novel builds to its climax. The Nike killings catch the attention of Jennifer Government, who is trying her best to bring the perpetrators to justice. When she finds out her former boyfriend is the mastermind behind the murders, it becomes a personal crusade. As she is tracking him down, John is busy using every means possible, including military, in trying to topple both the government and Team Advantage, the marketing consortium that is the direct competitor of US Alliance, the consortium which owns Nike. Along the way, Jennifer and John both cross paths with the rest of the other characters, all of whom John exploits in his attempt to make US Alliance the undisputed economic and political power in the world.

Barry's style begins both the story and the setting, and it reflects the lives of the characters. Barry's writing is fast-paced, full of quick cuts and snappy exposition and dialogue. In portraying the fast-moving, short-attention-span society (which is even faster and has a shorter attention span than our own), very few chapters last longer than a few pages. Within each chapter, Barry frequently jumps from one scene to the next—almost as if he constantly has his finger on a fast forward button. The characters are constantly in motion, and they rarely have the time to sit back and seriously reflect on the whirlwind of events. The few times they do, it's only because events have completely bypassed them, which

is usually only temporary. This lack of reflection is not a flaw; in fact, it enhances the overall effect of the novel.

So, is it fair to compare *Jennifer Government* to a classic like *Space Mermaids*? Probably not; it's neither groundbreaking nor highly original in its presentation. In addition, the pace of the novel is so frantic that you need to stop occasionally just to assimilate all the information. However, *Jennifer* is not a run-of-the-mill thriller either. Even though Barry rarely lets it truly sink in, the social satire is ever-present and

provides a nice backdrop to the almost frenetic pace of the story. And while he gives the reader little time to really absorb them, Barry also manages to make a few rather interesting points about the corrupting influence of huge conglomerates and organizations on society. Despite its flaws, *Jennifer Government* is an engaging read that both entertains and does a satisfying job of skewering the corporate world. ►

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Patron of the Arts by William Rotsler
New York: iBooks, 2002; \$12.00 tpb; 218 pages
reviewed by Richard Parent

I.

William Rotsler's *Patron of the Arts* is back. In its original incarnation, as a novelette, it was a Nebula Award finalist in 1972. For its first reincarnation, Rotsler expanded the novelette into novel form, which was published in 1974. Now, nearly thirty years later, it's back in a new trade paperback edition from iBooks, with a short, but gushingly enthusiastic foreword by Harlan Ellison. Ellison spends little time discussing the novel in question; in his estimation, it is "a really fine novel" that "speaks for itself." Instead, Ellison uses his brief turn at the soapbox to tell us what a wonderful guy William Rotsler was. Ellison eulogizes, "So let me speak for him, so he'll be noted in your thoughts if even for a moment because, so help me, I feel sorry for you. I regret and lament that you'll never know Bill Rotsler. You missed one of the great people, you who are about to read his first novel." I trust Ellison's taste in literature, but his "Love this book because you would have loved its author" sentiment raised a red flag in my mind. The big question was this: Why republish the book now? What does it have to offer contemporary readers, besides satisfying historical curiosity?

Patron of the Arts is a relatively straightforward sf adventure tale. It features a protagonist who is among the wealthiest, most powerful, handsome, intelligent, and sexually sought-after men in the universe. Oh, and did I mention he's an expert in deadly martial arts? As indicated by the title, our hero, Brian Thorne, is also a major patron of the arts, famous for his selfless patronage and his peerless eye for spotting new talent. Thorne becomes obsessed with sensation artist Michael Cilento, eventually commissioning him to create a sensation cube of Thorne's wife, the *nonpareil* Madelon. Though Madelon loves Thorne, she is drawn to Cilento, thus precipitating the rest of the novel's plot. Rotsler plays with standard narrative motifs—the love triangle, the joys and pains of immense wealth and power, the pursuit of the perfect woman—and adds standard sf tropes like rockets, asteroid ships, laser guns, and Mars colonies. What separates *Patron of the Arts* from a host of forgettable books that take up the same themes is that Rotsler is not at all interested in any of the book's technological and outer-space trappings. Instead, Rotsler presents his readers with a Trojan horse: while the outside appears to be an unremarkable adventure tale, the inside conceals a completely different novel—a New Wave exploration of subjectivity and personal philosophy.

Early Heinlein could have spun the tale of *Patron of the Arts* in a short story, and late Heinlein would have taken five or six hundred pages to tell the same story. Rotsler brings the book home at just over 200, economically aided by his decision to avoid the subjective perceptions of his secondary characters. We are shown Thorne's interpretations of Cilento, the artist, and Thorne's perceptions of the beautiful women in his life, but we never really see these characters as anything other than necessary players in the game of allowing Brian Thorne to relate to us his personal philosophies on everything from money to rotgut whiskey, with frequent and lengthy stops at love and art in between. The insight Rotsler gives us into Thorne is fascinating, but the cardboard cutout characters and the heroic majesty of Thorne—which precludes him from losing, *ever*—are flaws.

II.

The same year the novelette "Patron of the Arts" was published, Robert Silverberg published *Dying Inside*, one of the classic novels of New Wave sf. Like *Patron of the Arts*, *Dying Inside* follows the internal

life of its protagonist, David Selig, and marginalizes the characters surrounding him. However, the plot of *Dying Inside*—a psychic man loses his abilities—sets up a situation in which Selig cannot connect with the people around him because he knows too much about them and about what they think of him. Stripped of their privacy, the other characters in *Dying Inside* become at once well-rounded and complex, but also meaningless, as Selig is incapable of forming relationships with them. Hence, their flatness is a result of Selig's internal state, not a failure of the author.

Brian Thorne, despite his lack of psychic powers, has much the same problem. Thorne has the power, looks, and charisma to bed whomever he wants, and he seems to understand the inner workings and desires of those around him better than they know themselves. Like Selig, Thorne is left unsatisfied because of his inability to connect with others as equals. Thorne's impressive insight into the human condition comes not from any paranormal skills, but from his superhuman personality. Unlike Selig, who is thoroughly flawed and vulnerable, Thorne is nearly perfect and only barely vulnerable. Rotsler's Brian Thorne resembles later Heinlein characters, such as the multiply-degreed and supremely skilled foursome in 1980's *The Number of the Beast*. One can't help but like Deety and Zeb, Hilda and Jake, in *Number*, and you'd love to have them along when civilization collapses and you need to rebuild the world, but they're hardly like most of the people you know. Similarly, Rotsler's book presents a series of scintilla lectures on life, the universe, and everything, delivered by a man who combines only the best qualities of Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Warren Beatty, Bruce Lee, MacGyver, and Michelangelo's David.

III.

Patron of the Arts hasn't followed the typical sf aging pattern in the thirty years since it was written, as it has very little technology in it. As for the bits that are thrown in, none has been scientifically disproved or superseded by new technology. Thus, the future world created by Rotsler is still potentially our own future. The core of the book, however, is neither the technology nor the establishment of a future world, but is rather the exploration of character. The premise of the book is incidental to the experiences and subjective perceptions of the main character.

Only if one accepts the possibility that real, live people can exist today possessing what American conservatives praise as "moral clarity," however, can the novel be seen as presenting psychological nuance. While there is much psychology in the book, "nuance" may be too generous a term to describe Thorne's internal world. Thorne sees the world as either black or white, and the few times he is faced with true ambiguity, he turns his impressive intellect on the problem and reduces the ambiguity to a certainty. Hence, there is little opportunity for Thorne to wrestle with uncertainty, either psychological or moral. Thorne is *always* right.

This is a novel about the best of times and the worst of times when one is a Master of the Universe. Thorne's philosophies, outlook, actions, intentions, and style are what unite the several sections of the novel. As such, the book is a fascinating peek inside a unique individual's head, even if it fails to be Sven Birkerts's "Literature-with-a-capital-L." And I, for one, am not so sure that's a bad thing. ►

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The Metal Monster by A. Merritt
New York: Hippocampus Press, 2002; \$15.00; 237 pages
reviewed by Joseph Milicia

Abraham Merritt disliked the title of his 1920 second novel, as one learns from Stefan Dziemianowicz's valuable introduction to this new edition, but he never came up with a better one. He did try "The Metal Emperor" in 1927 when Hugo Gernsback serialized a revised and 20-percent-shortened version in *Science and Invention* (the original came out in *Argosy All-Story Weekly* and never appeared in book form); but he reverted to *The Metal Monster* in 1941 when a yet further revised (though not quite so shortened) version was published in a single issue of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. That final version has been the source of all novel editions up until now; Hippocampus Press offers us the first reprint of the *Argosy* original, which editor Dziemianowicz argues is far superior to the *FFM* version.

A first-time reader of Merritt's classic (like this reviewer) will soon discover that the title is indeed inadequate. The "monster," alien-spawned and humanity-threatening though it may be, is not mishapen or otherwise hideous to the eye. It's not a clanking robot or even a shape-shifting but still more or less humanoid Terminator—though it does "morph," as we now say. What it resembles is a city—a gigantic structure whose every component is alive. Surely the most remarkable feature of *The Metal Monster* for a reader of 2003 is Merritt's conception of an entity that seems *post-industrial*. It does not have moving parts like a machine, but is made of relatively small units—spheres, pyramids and cubes—that combine in infinite ways, held together by magnetic charge and fueled by the sun's energy. Does it need a bridge to span a chasm, or a giant hammer to smash the walls of a human city? No problem—the units coalesce with electronic speed, splitting away from or growing out of a larger structure to form, in almost fractal fashion, whatever is needed. The concept seems closer to our digital world than to *Popular Mechanics*, and Merritt's elaborate descriptions of the endless metamorphoses could be perfectly visualized through today's digital animation.

Perhaps the appropriate human emotion in the presence of such a "monster" is awe, curiosity, or great anxiety, rather than the shuddering revulsion a nonscientist might feel toward more organic "hive intelligences," whether a swarm of super-smart ants or wasps or an uncanny phalanx of cloned humans. Perhaps a tinge of terror, of the sort those of a certain age remember feeling when they first saw Kronos, an impersonal metallic menace (an energy-absorbing walking battery) in the 1956 B film of the same name, or the Krell underground machine on a superhuman scale in *Forbidden Planet* (same year). To be sure, Merritt's human characters feel all of these things as they regard the entity and its extensions, not to mention being creeped out by its photosensitive metallic surfaces: the myriad sparkles on myriad surfaces are actually eyes of a sort, giving a new sense to the term "all-seeing." But what his humans feel most predominantly—over and over again—is horror: They react exactly as if they were contemplating some creature in an H. P. Lovecraft story. (The two writers were well acquainted with, and expressed admiration for, each other's work, though Lovecraft thought Merritt sold out to mass taste. Dziemianowicz's introduction speculates as to which writer was more of an influence on the other.) I wonder if current readers will feel the chills Merritt's words are clearly intended to convey, considering that his entity is so utterly inorganic. My guess is that the author, consciously or not, realized that his conception was of a new order—hence his frustration with his own title—but fell back upon the language conventions of the weird tale: "Metal—alive and thinking! Goodwin, do you realize—good God!" he cried—and suddenly was silent, his face a page on which, visibly, horror pressed slowly and ever deeper its seal! 53. The chapter describing the entity's photovoltaic receptiveness is titled "Vampires of the Sun!" (exclamation point his).

To cloak his remarkable concept in narrative form, Merritt made use not only of the horror tale's typical locations but also of the generic tradition of H. Rider Haggard and his generation. Merritt's heroes are a quartet of scientist-adventurers who just happen to meet up in a remote "trans-Himalayan" region and soon encounter a lost

tribe of Persians, trapped in inaccessible valleys ever since battling Alexander the Great. Luckily, our narrator, Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, speaks ancient Persian; unluckily, the tribe is a cruel and bloodthirsty lot, though capable of building a fabulous fortified city. Fleeing their enemies, the quartet find themselves in a yet more remote valley, home of the metallic entity. It is also the home of Norhala, a sort of adopted human daughter of the entity, divinely, demonically beautiful. She is the imperious, flaming-haired sister of all those Shes-Who-Must-Be-Obedied in popular fiction and film.

Among the heroic four is a brother-sister team, conveniently providing a second, contrasting female who (a) needs constantly to be rescued; (b) serves as the love interest for Drake, Goodwin's younger colleague; and (c) is lured by Norhala to the "dark side"—i.e., is in danger of becoming a femme fatale herself. Merritt himself acknowledged in 1941 that "The people . . . with the exception of Norhala, are robots, automatons [ironically enough in such a setting, one might add]. It seemed impossible to get anything human against the metal background" (quoted from Dziemianowicz, 15).

Merritt had already used the story pattern of Westerners visiting an exotic, danger-filled, humanity-threatening realm in his first novel, *The Moon Pool*, which also featured Dr. Goodwin as a narrator. More precisely, that book originated as a weird tale for *All-Story Weekly* in 1918, but was greatly expanded in a sequel to include the adventure-exploration of the underground world into which characters had inexplicably disappeared in the novella. With extensive science-fictional apparatus, including footnotes, to provide speculation on the origins and nature of the weird phenomena, the novella and sequel were published as a single novel in 1919. It was one of the most popular novels of the next 40 years. The original serialization of *The Metal Monster* (our present text) is explicitly Goodwin's second adventure.

For the 1927 revision Merritt cut out all references to *The Moon Pool*, necessitating a change of name for the narrator; but he restored some of the connections in the 1941 version. Dziemianowicz's introduction details some of the differences between the three versions, preferring the original not only for its inclusion of "set-up" chapters (in which Goodwin brings his manuscript—"thoroughly verified and accepted by the International Association [of Science]" [22]—to Merritt himself) but for its more elaborate detail, featuring "the most florid and intoxicatingly descriptive prose Merritt ever penned" (14).

Whether the latter is a plus will be up to the individual reader. For this reviewer, a problem of the style is not the floridity but the sheer quantity of the description. Fascinating as the conception of the metallic entity is, one can become exhausted by entire chapters filled with detail such as the following:

Only one swift glance I gave them, my eyes held by a most extraordinary—edifice—altar—machine? I could find no word for it—then.

Its base was a scant hundred yards from where we had paused and concentric with the sides of the pit. It stood upon a thick circular pedestal of what appeared to be cloudy rock crystal supported by hundreds of thick rods of the same material.

Up from it lifted the—structure, a thing of glistening greenish cones and spinning golden disks; fantastic yet disquietingly symmetrical; bizarre as an angled headress worn by a mountainous Javanese god—yet coldly, painfully mathematical. In every direction the cones pointed, seemingly interwoven of strands of metal and of light. . . .

Silently from the left of the crystalline base swept an enormous sphere. Twice the height of a tall man it was, a paler blue than any of these Things I had seen, almost, indeed, an azure; different, too, in other subtle, indefinable ways.

Behind it glided a pair of the pyramidal shapes, their

pointed tips higher by a yard or more than the top of the sphere. They paused, regarding us. Out from the opposite arc of the crystal pedestal moved six other globes, somewhat smaller than the first and of a deep purplish luster.

They separated, lining up on each side of the leader now standing a little in advance of the twin tetrahedrons, rigid and motionless as watching guards. (97)

This particular description is fairly straight forward, except for the comparison to the "Javanese god"; but frequently—and fortunately, for any readers who might tire of the pure geometry and kaleidoscopic colors—Merritt seeks out analogies, as if he, or his narrator, were wrestling with the problem of how to represent the utterly alien without falling back upon hackneyed comparisons. Some of the similes may strike today's reader as quaint (one vertically structured war-weapon is like "the great tower of the Woodworth Building in New York"), but at least one passage, describing the nucleus of a "radiant disk," is startling in its seemingly deliberate evocation of Dante's vision at the end of the *Divine Comedy*:

Like an immense rose it was, an incredible rose of a thousand disc clustering petals. It blossomed with a myriad shifting hues, effulgent, radiant. And instant by instant the flood of varicolored flame that poured into its petals down from the sapphire ovals waxed and waned in crescendos and diminuendos of reluctant harmonies—ecstatic, awesome.

The heart of the rose was a star of incandescent ruby! (99)

More conventionally, Merritt—unless we should say only his all-too-human narrator—anthropomorphizes the entity by attributing emotions to certain parts of it. Most notably, two offshoots, the Disk and what Goodwin calls the Keeper (shaped like an inverted cross but also looking both humanoid and squidlike) seem angelic and devilish, respectively, rather than just "energy battling against itself." At one point the Disk radiates "laughter" while in the Keeper Goodwin senses "a surge of anger" (169).

The "Dante" passage is one of several where Merritt seems to conflate scientific observation with mystic vision. The labels "scientific romance" and "science fantasy" have been applied to *The Metal Monster*, fittingly enough for passages like these, along with the Journey-to-the-Lost-City adventure-story structure. Still, the hook is surely as much "science fiction" as anything that followed Gernsback's coinage later in the decade. Goodwin, shuddering in alternating rapture and revulsion though he often is, does keep to his role of scientist, offering the most detailed documentation possible of his subject of investigation, while asking the questions and offering the speculations one expects of a person of his profession and era. It is easy to imagine Merritt in conflict as he wrote *The Metal Monster*, attempting to balance "scientific reporting" and a tale of terror and thrills, and on a deeper level, having to use literary conventions directly out of the Victorian age to portray an entity perhaps more easily conceived 80 years into the future. ▶

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Coyote by Allen Steele

New York: Ace Books, 2002; \$23.95 hc; 400 pages
reviewed by Walter Minkel

Allen Steele has made a career of writing action-packed hard sci-fi works include *All-American Alien Boy* (Ace, 1997) and *Chronopace* (Ace, 2001). One of his fans on Amazon describes his work this way: "Steele writes hard sf in a voice that reminds me of Tom Clancy, Bob Seger songs, and Heinlein." In *Coyote*, he has fashioned a story of a group of dissidents, led by a charismatic commander named after a Confederate general, who escape from an ultra-right-wing future American government to establish a settlement on a satellite in a double-gas-giant system in Ursa Major. The escape from the Gingrich Space Center on Earth is tense—and well it should be, since the group of dissidents must creep away grandly, under the eyes of both the media and the military. The reader breathes a sigh of relief when they get away.

Except that their getting away wasn't as clean as they had hoped. As soon as the crew goes into its 250-year term of cryogenic sleep, the ship (*the Alabama*) has been programmed to awaken a crew member to abort the mission if a fail-safe signal is not received from Earth. And it doesn't receive that signal. Fortunately—for the settlers as a group—the ship awakes the wrong man, communications officer Les Gillis, who unfortunately—for him—discovers that the ship won't let him go back to sleep. So Gillis goes slowly mad, spending the rest of his life alone among hundreds of sleeping settlers. But before he dies, he sees a strange light near the ship. He never learns what it might be, but we know *the Alabama* is not alone out there.

So far so good, and the rest of the plot sails along well. Of course, there are sympathizers of the United Republic of America among the settlers, including the man who *should* have been awakened by that missing fail-safe signal, and some tensions and bumps that must be negotiated. But once the dissidents have escaped, *Coyote* doesn't really move away from space opera until the settlers—and especially their teenage children—have to deal with the arbitrary and often hostile environment of the big moon.

The reason much of the first segment feels to me like space opera is that it supposes a creepily Dubya-oid future next century for this country that seems only half-cooked. Sure, I shudder at the direction in which the country seems to be going, and I can certainly imagine a future in which the powerful white minority (and by 2040, it will be a minority) will set up a nation made up of the South, the West, and the Midwest, with only New Yorkers, New Englanders, and Pacific Northwesterners breaking away to form the last frontiers of liberalism.

But I can't picture the right-wing URA not glorying in fundamentalist Christianity, at least for show, with a president and senators invoking the Lord at every turn and praying loudly.

Steele, however, avoids religion in his URA; nowhere do his characters profess the kind of Christianity that should have become a strangling state religion. I can only suppose that he wanted to avoid the issue of religion so as not to offend any of his readers who are believers, but removing the passion of Christian fundamentalism surely takes a lot of the bite, and the believability, from his repressed future America. He also avoids race as an issue, which makes Steele's worldbuilding in *Coyote* even harder to swallow. You can't call your shuttle craft the *Jesse Helms* and the *George Wallace* without dealing with the ungainly baggage those names carry.

The reader may feel a certain multiple-personality syndrome as they read *Coyote* because the book was published in segments in *Asimov's Science Fiction* in 2001 and 2002 and then revised for publication as a book. It still feels more than a bit like a collection of stories rather than a novel, because there are very clear divisions between its sections. The 80-page first section of the book, for example—the daring escape from the URA—is written in present tense. The second—the sad tale of Leslie Gillis, who ends up painting a huge mural on the walls of the *Alabama* and writing a strange fantasy novel that becomes, after Gillis's death, the first literary work in the culture of *Coyote*—is in past tense. The third—the reawakening of the crew and the political jockeying of the various parties to establish a life on *Coyote*—is again in present tense. Finally, there's a Book Two, occupying nearly half the novel, written in past tense. The present-tense sections are like a hundred other sf novels; the past-tense sections are the ones that transcend the sf-adventure clichés.

Once the initial political/military hassles of the first three parts of the plot have played themselves out, the remainder of the book is very good indeed. A group of teenage children of the settlers—three boys and a girl—feeling hemmed in by the discipline that Captain Robert E. Lee establishes in the town of Liberty, take off to explore the planet and dare its fierce and hungry boids and cat-hales. The boids in particular are frightening predators—huge birdlike creatures with hooked beaks that learn quickly how to track their new, human prey.

The settlers' children, having watched their parents dare the powers that be and get away with it, now must themselves dare the

powers that be. And while risking their lives on the unexplored moon, two of the boys get into a competition over the girl, ending in a tragedy and a pregnancy. Carlos Montero, one of the two, goes off on his own in anger and despair. He lives alone for several months, making some important discoveries about Coyote and about himself, and coming back an adult. After acting like a spoiled brat, he returns ready to take

his place in a community that needs him very much. Thus, while *Coyote's* first half is adequate, it's the *Huckleberry-Finn*-meets-*Moby-Dick* story that makes up much of the second half that's the truly worthwhile read. ▶

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The Eyre Affair by Jasper Fforde
New York: Penguin, 2003; \$14.00 tpb; 374 pages
reviewed by Russell Blackford

In a fantastic version of 1985, the Crimean War continues from the previous century, with no end in sight; there are political and military tensions between Great Britain and the People's Republic of Wales; and the entire texture of society, culture, and technology is like nothing ever seen in our own reality. Welcome, then, to the first of Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next novels, *The Eyre Affair*, and to a world in which vampires and werewolves are real, time travel and the cloning of extinct species are commonplace, and the lines between life and literature are blurred.

In this world, Hollywood movies, popular music, and TV sitcoms do not seem to exist. Instead, highbrow art, music, and literature reign supreme. Millions of people love the works of Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen, and the Brontës with a passion that societies in our own reality reserve for sports stars, pop divas, and clean-cut, muscular actors. The question of who wrote Shakespeare's plays is a matter of fierce controversy, while the supporters of artistic movements struggle for success by every possible means, including riots and the use of political power to suppress their opponents' freedom of expression (well, some things never change).

The Thursday Next books are named after their heroine, a feisty little sleuth who shares many qualities with Jane Eyre herself, including a mix of passion and good sense, not to mention the ability to get tangled in a seemingly hopeless love affair. Her brother ordered their world's equivalent of the disastrous charge of the Light Brigade, and her lover had no choice but to give evidence against him after his death. It's a case of love versus family honor, and it has left Thursday confused and emotionally scarred.

Thursday works for the Special Operations Network, a system of police agencies, each of which is dedicated to a different class of highly unusual or specialized cases. Her own expertise is in literary investigations—not a trivial area of work in an alternative reality where serious money is tied up in the literary world, and where the fact/fiction boundary can be crossed from both sides with disconcerting results. It is possible for characters from Thursday's reality to enter the specific world of a book, play, or poem, while characters from those other worlds can be brought into hers. With the right technology, a literary work can be changed instantaneously, in all extant and future copies, by alteration of the original manuscript. Such mutilation of well-loved masterpieces causes a public outcry.

In *The Eyre Affair*, the world's third-most-wanted criminal, the sinister and powerful Acheron Hades, hatches a dastardly extortion plot, threatening to kill off the main characters of Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit*, then Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, unless his demands are met. Thursday matches wits with him in an effort to foil his schemes and bring the fiend to some kind of justice. In doing so, she must enter the pages of *Jane Eyre*, meeting such favorite characters as Mr. Rochester, Mrs. Fairfax, and, of course, Jane herself.

I doubt that anyone will pick up all of the literary references in *The Eyre Affair*—I'm sure that I missed many of them. They range from Elizabethan drama to the novels of Alfred Bester and Kurt Vonnegut, not to mention *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. *The Eyre Affair* is lighthearted, swiftly paced, and delightfully knowing, crammed with literary and linguistic jokes. The writing is crisp and modern, while other aspects of the book—its zany plot logic, flaunting of pastiche, vivid but superficial characterization (complete with humorous character names), and avoidance of much thematic seriousness—are distinctively postmodernist. Fforde does not attempt to imitate the style and texture of a Victorian novel, but he does create some nice period dialogue for his recycled nineteenth-century characters, such as

Jane and Mr. Rochester.

The Eyre Affair is a lightweight book, but it is a lightweight book for people who love literature. I suppose its message, if it has one, is that high art can be fun, that there is more to life than popular entertainment—but that point is not made in an explicit, much less an insistent, manner. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a less preachy book. Fforde simply allows us to immerse ourselves, for a day or two, in a world where the classics of literature, music, and pictorial art are valued and cherished. There is little to dislike about *The Eyre Affair*. At times, the storytelling technique is slightly raw: the narrative is told in the first person by Thursday, except for occasional lapses into a third person viewpoint with no explanation that I picked up as to how the two strands of narration relate to each other. Notwithstanding that, I defy anyone with a love of literature not to enjoy this book.

The edition reviewed is the mass-market U.S. edition from Penguin. Another two volumes in the series have been published. The second, *Laurie R. King*, is available in both British and American editions, while the third, *The Well of Lost Souls*, was recently released in the U.K. The Thursday Next books are establishing a cult following, and it is easy to see why, if they are all as charming as *The Eyre Affair*. I'm not sure that I'll bother with the sequels myself, but only because I tire of this kind of comic fiction more quickly than most. I have never managed to read many Terry Pratchett novels, and my grasp of Douglas Adams's work is sadly deficient, even though I have read most of it.

Still, anyone who loves English literature should open *The Eyre Affair* with an expectation of delight at seeing old favorites (books and characters) in new settings, not to mention plenty of good laughs. I expect that the Thursday Next series will continue to gain readers. Science fiction conventions of the future are likely to be well-stocked with fans who love the stories and characters, have memorized vast amounts of the detail, and are hanging out for each new adventure. Judging by this first volume, it couldn't happen to a nicer series. ▶

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(Editorial continued from page 24)

have dealt with them as speedily as possible. I am a bit scared when I realize that I was as inefficient a month before the operation as a month after. Boy, am I living clean now!

Other NYRSP staffers are going through transitions now too: job hunting, beginning teaching, entering graduate school. So many of our volunteers are a bit unreliable just now in regard to showing up for NYRSP meetings. And I suspect that more than a few of our reviewers are in the same boat—otherwise they would be sending in their reviews.

Meanwhile, we are just buried and overwhelmed by catch-up tasks, and are looking to hire some part-time help right away for filing, cleanup, and organization. We are putting up signs in the local library hoping to attract a local student to work. But if you are willing, or know anyone willing, to volunteer for some work for a day or two, or more, here in Pleasantville in October or November, contact us.

And we'll see some of you at Albacorn (in Lake George, NY) and at World Fantasy Con (in Washington, DC) in October. ▶

—David G. Hartwell
& the editors

Richard Horton
More Capsule Reviews

James D. Macdonald is probably best known for the *Magnificent* books, a series of space operas with fantasy trappings written in collaboration with his wife, Debra Doyle. *The Apocalypse Door* (New York: Tor Books 2002; \$22.95 hc; 224 pages) is a fast-paced contemporary fantastical thriller with an unusual protagonist: Peter Crossman, a modern day Knight Templar (and Catholic priest). Another main character is a nun, a member of the Poor Clares. Naturally she's sexy as all get-out: too bad about that celibacy vow!

We meet Peter on what should be an easy mission: break into a New Jersey warehouse on the off-chance that it might contain a clue to the fate of some missing UN peacekeepers. But in the warehouse he finds some strange mushrooms that appear to be repelled by a crucifix. And shortly later his contact is dead, with his face sliced off. The Poor Clare introduces herself by trying to assassinate Peter. Evidence turns up that the rival Teutonic Knights have tried something very dangerous. And scientists taking spectra of the sky have detected organic chemicals that might be blood. The apocalypse might be around the corner, and Peter and his friends are the front line of defense.

The book is action packed, with a new twist almost every chapter. It's not perfect—there's a subplot in alternating chapters that doesn't quite fit. Peter isn't a wholly convincing priest (he is concerned enough about the spiritual health of people to give last rites rigorously, but you do notice that he often has a lot to do with the necessity for the last rites). The rapidly moving plot doesn't always develop some of the interesting points quite enough, and there are a few holes in it as well. But it's not really meant to be taken too seriously—it's a fun read, fast as a sermon on a hot summer day in an air-conditioned church, off-handedly funny, with the odd neat detail of Catholic history.

Wondrous Beginnings (New York: DAW Books, 2003; \$6.99 pb; 316 pages) is the first of a set of three anthologies edited by Steven H. Silver and Martin H. Greenberg. Each book includes the first story from a well-known writer in our field. This book focuses on science fiction, while *Magnificent Beginnings* focuses on fantasy, and *Horrible Beginnings* on horror. An especially nice feature of this series is the authors' introductions, which are often quite long, usually giving interesting details of their early careers.

Silver and Greenberg have chosen an impressive temporal range of authors for the science fiction volume. The earliest is Murray Leinster, whose first story, "The Runaway Skyscraper," appeared in 1919. The latest is Julie E. Czerneda, whose "First Contact, Inc." appeared in 1997. Writers who debuted in each decade from the 1930s through 1980s are included.

The stories are of varying quality, as you might expect. Not often is a writer's first sale an enduring classic. Probably only Orson Scott Card's "Ender's Game" (the short version of his famous novel) would qualify from this book. That isn't to say that the stories are bad, however. Most of these pieces are at least enjoyable. The stories as a group make for a decent anthology, but the added value of the introductions makes this a truly worthwhile purchase. It's also interesting to see for which writers the first story is characteristic of their work. Hal Clement's "Proof," with its exotic aliens and its pro-scientific attitude, and Catherine Asaro's romantic "Dance in Blue" both clearly prefigure, in theme and in style, their authors' future work. But Barry N. Malzberg's gimmicky though amusing "We're Coming Through the Window" and Howard Waldrop's "Lunchbox," a tale of Martians meeting the Viking lander that sold to *Analog* of all places, are decidedly off those authors' usual track.

The other authors featured here are L. Sprague de Camp, Arthur C. Clarke, Anne McCaffrey, Gene Wolfe, George R. R.

Martin, Jack McDevitt, Jerry Olkion, Lois McMaster Bujold, Stephen Baxter, and Michael A. Burstein. The fantasy volume includes the likes of Andre Norton, Peter Beagle, and Ursula K. Le Guin; the horror volume features Henry Kuttner, Tanith Lee, Kim Newman, and others. Any of these books will be intriguing for anyone interested in the history of the sf field.

One of the most ambitious, coherent, and philosophically interesting Future Histories of recent years comes from the pen of Brian Stableford. This project began with his 1985 nonfiction book *The Third Millennium*, written with David Langford. In 1986 he published the first story set in that milieu, and throughout the '90s he published quite a few further stories, set from the very near future to centuries ahead.

He has capped this achievement with six novels: *Inherit the Earth* (1998), *Architects of Emortality* (1999), *The Fountains of Youth* (2000), *The Cassandra Complex* (2001), *Dark Anarist* (2002), and finally *The Omega Expedition* (New York: Tor Books, 2002; \$27.95 hc, 544 pages). Most of the novels are expansions of earlier short stories. The central theme of the entire project is "emortality": the realization of the dream of indefinitely prolonged human life. The books and stories sketch a future in which human life is nearly destroyed by the Plague Wars of the twenty-first century, and in which the entire ecosystem undergoes a nearly terminal crash. But from the ashes rises a new utopia: nanotechnology allows for greatly extended lifespans, while various biotechnological innovations rescue the biosphere. A variety of strategies for true "emortality" arise, including genetic changes, "cyborgization" (integration of mechanical devices into the body), and even "chimerization" (based on the completely different biology of a different planet), which will allow people to adapt their bodies to radically different environments. But as *The Omega Expedition* opens, there is a long-term threat to this utopia, in the form of the "Afterlife," mindless beings that eat anything organic in their path. As it turns out, there is also another much nearer-term threat.

The action in the book turns on the unfreezing of Adam Zimmerman, one of the key figures of the early twenty-first century, a man obsessed with immortality, who finally had himself frozen with instructions that he be awakened when immortality was possible. The main viewpoint character, however, is Madoc Tamlin, who is awakened as a sort of trial run for Zimmerman. Tamlin had been kind of a "fixer" for a member of the ruling elite of the twenty-second century, and he was apparently frozen as punishment for some crime he can't remember. He soon learns that he has been roused by one faction of thirty-first-century emortals, people who have their physical development arrested before puberty. Before long the other factions are involved as well, but then the small group of reawakened sleepers and advocates of various forms of emortality are kidnapped.

From this point the main thrust of the novel revolves around the threat of devastating war, and a brave attempt to avert this war. But instead of action, we get lots of talk, arguably too much. I will say, though, that I found the talk interesting and quite thought-provoking. Stableford uses this platform to discuss the meaning of life, the definition of intelligence, and how to make truly extended lives worthwhile. So, though the book is a bit static, and displays such characteristic Stableford failings as his inability to convincingly portray a romantic relationship, on balance I found it absorbing and a very worthy capstone to an impressive feat of extended speculation. ▶

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Fall 2003: Pileup

We are back from Worldcon and have immediately turned to putting together this *NYRSF* issue. Torcon came in second in modern history (after Nolacon 2) in Worldcon disorganization, and as in New Orleans, we had a good time anyway. The staffers were invariably polite and always tried hard to be helpful and fix problems, and were kept mighty busy fixing them by all appearances. Kathryn is planning to write a piece on child care at sf conventions in general, sparked by our generally unsuccessful experiences at recent conventions. And we were in the luxury hotel attached to the convention center, but the bar and restaurant were closed for construction, sigh. The weather was in general great, though; the drive from Westchester County was beautiful; and we came in third as Best Semiprozine in the Hugos, a good showing. And I lost to Gardner Dozois by only eleven votes in the Best Editor category.

A particularly fine aspect of the trip was that we got to do many of the things we had planned, and missed, for our cancelled trip in June. We stayed for a couple of days with Rob Sawyer and Carolyn Clink before the convention, went to dinner at the home of Terry Green and Merle Casci, and at the home of Karl and Janice Schroeder, and visited with Peter Watts. I also spent part of a day at the Merrill Library academic conference on sf organized by Alan Weiss, where Margaret Atwood gave a speech and was on a panel—not quite the ALA and the SFRA, but still satisfying. And I wish to note that Margaret Atwood was an active, gracious, and provocative participant, with many good things to say about sf, which she reads and has written (though she uses that term to describe neither *The Handmaid's Tale* nor *Oryx and Crake*—in her lexicon, those are in the dystopian and scientific romance traditions respectively).

Peter Hartwell entered first grade the day after we returned, and baby Elizabeth starts morning daycare Monday. With these changes, we begin a new stage of life again. I am sure that when things settle down, we will look back on this week after our return as a pleasant interlude between crises, when merely frantic multitasking was required of us. Kathryn got a fever and went on antibiotics (of course, this required her to endure the local anti-saxs protocol on Friday).

I apologize to subscribers and others who emailed or sent letters between May and August. A lot of them got misplaced just before and after my angioplasty. In early August, I began to find lost work, unanswered letters and orders, uncashed checks, and other embarrassments, and

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Margaret Atwood with Jean-Luc Trudel at the Merrill Library.

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